

SECURITY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF ‘RELIGION’ IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

The thesis begins from the observation that religion has become an object of considerable public and IR-disciplinary debate, centred on the increasing political assertiveness of many religious groups and movements and the apparent complicity of religion in violent conflict around the world. It is proposed that this ‘politics *about* religion’ should be understood as fought out within and through discourses that construct the meaning of religion, that shape ideas about its proper character and purpose, and that influence the form it can take in society. Within this general objective, the thesis has three interrelated aims. It seeks to denaturalise the concept of religion as it is conventionally used in international politics, politicise its construction, and examine the contribution of thinking about security in the liberal tradition to the production of specific contemporary discourses of religion.

The thesis identifies and denaturalises two prominent assumptions about religion, namely, that it is a separate domain of human activity and a genus. The partial and contested character of these ways of imagining religion often goes unrecognised, but they derive from particular liberal security strategies for ending the Wars of Religion. That such traditions of thought underpin much scholarship on religion in international politics and continue to inform security responses to religious violence is argued to be problematic; this is because they rely on empirically questionable assumptions, are contested politically, displace conflict rather than resolving it, and are bound up with the legitimisation of a liberal political order, its imagination of security, and the forms of religion compatible with it. The argument that these particular discourses of religion are being articulated as part of contemporary liberal responses to religious violence is illustrated by Tony Blair’s representation of Islam when he was Prime Minister of the UK. The thesis concludes that because the meaning of religion is likely to remain a divisive question at the centre of international politics in the coming decades, those who study and practice it must be cognisant of the politics involved in all statements about religion – including their own.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about the meaning of ‘religion’. Working from the premise that what religion means is not quite so straightforward as is generally believed, the thesis seeks to examine the role of liberal security thinking in creating our present certainties about what is meant by ‘religion’, alongside discussion about the political implications of meaning certain things by ‘religion’. The background to the project is an increasingly important public debate about the place and role of religion in modern societies, and the problematic connection of religion with violence in many parts of the world. This introduction will begin by outlining what I am calling here the ‘politics *about* religion’, before outlining the aims of the thesis, the key concepts involved, and the structure of the chapters.

The politics about religion

This thesis begins from the observation that religion has become an object of considerable debate in the public sphere of Western societies and in the discipline of International Politics (IP). The Iranian revolution of 1979, the role of the Catholic Church in the ‘third wave’ of democratisation, the rise of the Christian right in the U.S. and Hindu nationalism in India, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the rhetoric of the ‘clash of civilisations’, immigration of religious minorities and debates over the Christian identity of Europe: all of these events have served make religion the object of general public debate.

This came as a surprise to many, for the gradual demise or increasing marginality of religion had been long been predicted by social scientists and assumed as conventional wisdom by large sections of the general public in Europe. For much of the twentieth century, conventional wisdom in the West was predicting that religion would wither on the vine of modernity. It was expected to fade to insignificance, both in the lives of individuals and the wider structures of society. With some notable exceptions though,¹ sociologists now tell us we should abandon the assumption that modernity is necessarily corrosive of religious belief and practice, for despite increasing industrialisation,

¹ For example Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

urbanisation and education, most major religious traditions in most parts of the world have retained their vitality or experienced growth.² Peter Berger, once closely associated with secularisation theory, now warns that 'one statement can be made with great confidence: Those who neglect religion in their analyses of contemporary affairs do so at great peril'.³ The growing consensus on the importance of religion is beginning to be registered even in the European heartland of secularisation, where few now venture to dismiss religious revivals elsewhere as temporary, epiphenomenal reactions to modernisation processes.⁴

The persistence and apparent vitality of religion prompted a reconsideration of the secularisation paradigm, but it also generated a 'politics *about* religion', by which I mean the often passionate struggles over the place and role of religious traditions in the modern world. Dispute centres not only on the relationship between religion and the state, the limits of religious freedom, questions of whether religion can play a role in politics, education, economic organisation, decisions on ethical questions raised by scientific advances, and whether the persistence of religion is a good thing or not. Much of the discussion has been animated by observation of the increasing political assertiveness of religious groups and movements over the past thirty years and the apparent implication of religion in violent conflict in many parts of the world. Controversy is sustained by different interpretations of these developments and how they are connected to religion, together with competing evaluations of their likely implications for secular societies, tolerant and peaceful politics, economic development and harmonious inter-faith or inter-civilisation relations.

Even governments have not been able to avoid involvement in the politics *about* religion. The bombings in New York, Madrid and London raised controversial questions about causes and responsibility, inevitably involving wider issues concerning religion, that governments were forced to confront as they cast about for adequate responses. Were the attackers driven by religion, or was the religious language of protest simply an epiphenomenal expression of more fundamental social, political and economic resentments? Was this a problem of Islam, a problem of religion, or neither? Under what

² Peter L. Berger, 'The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview', in Peter L. Berger (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1999); José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Grace Davie, *The Sociology of Religion* (London: SAGE Publications, 2007), pp. 46-66; David Martin, 'The Secularization Issue: Prospect and Retrospect', *British Journal of Sociology* vol. 42, no. 3 (1991).

³ Berger, 'The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview', p. 18.

⁴ José Casanova, 'Public Religions Revisited', in Hent de Vries (ed.), *Religion: Beyond a Concept* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 101-102.

circumstances is religion implicated in violence? What role could Islam and other faiths play in preventing and defusing conflict?

Public interest in religion has been echoed by a growing number of those who study international politics. Where religion was previously peripheral to the concerns of scholars of the subject, an increasing body of work is attempting to understand the implications of the salience of religion in the modern world by examining the behaviour and role of religion or religious groups, values and institutions.⁵ It is argued that ‘The intersection of religion and international relations has become a major focus for the analysis of contemporary international relations’.⁶ This comment by Friedrich Kratochwil, a leading scholar of IP, is representative of a growing body of thought. Jonathan Fox has similarly asserted that ‘no understanding of international relations can be complete without bringing religion into the discipline’.⁷ In his introductory textbook on the subject, Jeffrey Haynes has written that ‘until recently, it appeared that religious actors could safely be ignored in international politics because they appeared to be collectively insignificant. Now, however, many governments, analysts and observers would agree that things have changed in various ways’.⁸ Eva Bellin concurs, commenting that ‘real-world events have put religion front and center in current affairs, posing puzzles that demand explanations from our field if we are not to lapse into scholastic irrelevance’.⁹ In a similar fashion, Elizabeth Shakman Hurd observes that ‘It is now unsustainable to claim that religion plays no significant role in international relations; it has become a critical consideration in international security, global politics, and U.S. foreign policy’.¹⁰

A growing body of academic literature is therefore seeking to explore the political implications of the persistence or resurgence of religion.¹¹ As Bellin points out, this

⁵ See for example Ken R. Dark, (ed.), *Religion and International Relations* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Relations* (New York, N.Y.; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Jeffrey Haynes, *Introduction to International Relations and Religion* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2007); Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopoulos, (eds.), *Religion in International Relations: The Return From Exile* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁶ Friedrich Kratochwil, 'Religion and (Inter-)National Politics: On the Heuristics of Identities, Structures, and Agents', *Alternatives* vol. 30 (2005), p. 113.

⁷ Fox and Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Relations*, p. 2.

⁸ Haynes, *Introduction to International Relations and Religion*, p. 3.

⁹ Eva Bellin, 'Faith in Politics: New Trends in the Study of Religion and Politics', *World Politics* vol., no. 60 (2008), p. 315.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 134.

¹¹ See, for example, Peter L. Berger, (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1999); John D. Carlson and Erik C. Owens, (eds.), *The Sacred and the Sovereign: Religion and International Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003); Dark, (ed.), *Religion and International Relations*; Fox and Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Relations*; Haynes, *Introduction to International Relations and Religion*; Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson,

literature is still developing, and ‘few of the new studies go much beyond exhortation for a paradigm shift in IR’.¹² That which does has mostly concentrated on examining the difference made to international politics by the beliefs, practices, discourses and political strategies of religious groups. Jonathan Fox and Schmuel Sandler summarise this basic approach in their recommendation that ‘we must include in our understanding and research of international relations the various manifestations of religion and their influence on the range of social and political phenomena that the discipline of international relations seeks to explain’.¹³ One aspect in particular has been understandably high on the list of priorities: conflict. Interest in the importance of religion in international politics was stimulated especially by the 11 September attacks, and consequently much of this work has sought to question the security implications of the religious resurgence.¹⁴ The increasing attention to religion in the discipline of International Politics has echoed the concerns animating broader societal debates on the subject, asking the same kinds of questions about the complicity of religion in violence and the possibility that religion might contribute to a more peaceful world.

Aims of the thesis

This thesis grew out of a sense that the answers given to the questions animating the politics *about* religion are at least as significant politically as the activities of the religious groups and movements that these scholars seek to understand. The specific approach taken here was prompted by two observations. The first was that while debates over the

(eds.), *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); George Moyser, (ed.), *Politics and Religion in the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 1991); Petito and Hatzopoulos, (eds.), *Religion in International Relations: The Return From Exile*; Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and James Piscatori, (eds.), *Transnational Religion and Fading States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997); Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations*; David Westerlund, (ed.), *Questioning the Secular State: The Worldwide Resurgence of Religion in Politics* (London: Hurst & Company, 1996). Also special issues of *Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs* 42 (Spring 1998), *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29:3 (2000), and *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17:3 (2005)

¹² Bellin, 'Faith in Politics: New Trends in the Study of Religion and Politics', p. 316.

¹³ Fox and Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Relations*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁴ See also here Audrey Kurth Cronin, 'Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism', *International Security* vol. 27, no. 3 (2003); Bruce Hoffman, "'Holy Terror': The Implications of a Terrorism Motivated by Religion' (Santa Monica: RAND, 1993); Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 3rd ed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002); Oliver McTernan, *Violence in God's Name: Religion in an Age of Conflict* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2003); Magnus Ranstorp, 'Terrorism in the Name of Religion', *Journal of International Affairs* vol. 50, no. 1 (1996); David Rapoport, 'Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions', *The American Political Science Review* vol. 78, no. 3 (1984); Rudolph and Piscatori, (eds.), *Transnational Religion and Fading States*.

impact of religion on domestic and international politics relied on some notion of religion, the question of what religion meant was, if anything, just as controversial as issues of how it should relate to politics. The second observation was that answers to the broader questions concerning the rightful place and role (if any) of religious traditions in the twenty-first century depended to a considerable degree on how one answered the more fundamental questions about the character and purpose of religion.

On the basis of these assumptions, it is proposed in this thesis that the politics *about* religion should be understood as fought out within and through discourses that construct the meaning of religion, that shape ideas about its proper character and purpose, and that influence the form it can take in society. This general objective encompasses three interrelated aims. The thesis seeks to denaturalise the concept of religion as it is conventionally used in international politics, politicise its construction, and examine the contribution of thinking about security in the liberal tradition to the production of specific contemporary discourses of religion. These three aims are explored in relation to the central research question, which is: *how has 'religion' been constituted within liberal discourses of security in the UK, with reference to the Tony Blair's representation of Islam?*

Briefly stated, the thesis identifies two widely-shared assumptions about religion, namely, that it is a subsection of culture, and a genus. Both of these modes of imagining the concept were first articulated within liberal strategies for the pacification of early modern societies riven by confessional tension. It argues that these discourses continue to inform much scholarship on religion in international politics, as well as making it seem natural and necessary to approach the problem of religious violence with certain kinds of solutions. This argument is illustrated with a discussion of Tony Blair's public statements on the subject of Islam. However, the thesis argues that these discourses are, in different ways, at the heart of the contemporary politics *about* religion. While their validity is often taken for granted, particular instances of these discourses often involve propositions that are politically contested, empirically dubious, and closely connected to the justification of a liberal political order.

The thesis differs from much of the existing work on religion in the discipline of International Politics in that it does not seek to explain the behaviour of religious groups or movements, use religion as a variable to explain various events or phenomena, or explore how religion might reshape international affairs. It is concerned with orientations towards 'religion' rather than religious orientations towards politics. In this respect it

approaches the question of religion from an angle similar to that explored by Elizabeth Shakman Hurd in her studies of secularism in international politics.¹⁵ She has investigated how secularist understandings of the relationship between religion and politics have conditioned interpretations of and responses to the proposed Turkish accession to the European Union, the Iranian revolution, the rise of political Islam and the phenomenon of religious resurgence in general. Where Hurd is interested in the authorisation, within international politics, of certain versions of the religion-politics relationship and the delegitimisation of others, this thesis is concerned with the authorisation of specific constructions of the character and purpose of religion.

Key concepts

Three concepts are fundamental to the central research question: religion, security and liberalism. First of all, the thesis deals with the meaning of religion. References above to 'constructions of religion' and 'denaturalising religion' indicate that this thesis assumes this meaning to be historically variable and socially constructed. In this regard, it draws on work in anthropology and religious studies that has approached religion as a category constructed within discourse.¹⁶ These scholars have argued that religion does not exist independently of our shared consciousness that certain beliefs, practices and experiences are instances of it. It only appears historically through a process in which certain things are differentiated from others: religion is distinguished from magic and superstition, from

¹⁵ Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, 'The Political Authority of Secularism in International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations* vol. 10, no. 2 (2004); Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, 'Political Islam and Foreign Policy in Europe and the United States', *Foreign Policy Analysis* vol. 3, no. 4 (2007); Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, 'Theorizing Religious Resurgence', *International Politics* vol. 44, no. 6 (2007); Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*.

¹⁶ William E. Arnal, 'Definition', in Willi Braun and Russell McCutcheon (eds.), *Guide to the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 2000); Talal Asad, 'Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz', *Man* vol. 18, no. 2 (1983); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993); David Chidester, 'Anchoring Religion in the World: A Southern African History of Comparative Religion', *Religion* vol. 26 (1996); Gavin Hyman, 'The Study of Religion and the Return of Theology', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* vol. 72, no. 1 (2004); Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Russell T. McCutcheon, 'The Category "Religion" and the Politics of Tolerance', in Arthur L. Greil and David G. Bromley (eds.), *Defining Religion: Investigating the Boundaries Between the Sacred and Secular* (Oxford: Elsevier Science, 2003); Russell T. McCutcheon, 'Religion, Ire, and Dangerous Things', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* vol. 72, no. 1 (2004); Jonathan Z. Smith, 'A Matter of Class: Taxonomies of Religion', *Harvard Theological Review* vol. 89, no. 4 (1996); Jonathan Z. Smith, 'Religion, Religions, Religious', in Mark C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Mark C. Taylor, 'Introduction', in Mark C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Graham Ward, *True Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003); Graham Ward, 'The Future of Religion', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* vol. 74, no. 1 (2006).

science and from secularism, and from politics, law and morality; the addition of the plural term 'religions' constructs discrete bodies of identifiable beliefs and practices distinguishable from other such systems.¹⁷ It is not only particular ideas about what religion is that are constituted within discourse, but the very idea of religion itself. As Talal Asad points out, this historical awareness calls into question the very possibility of a stable and transhistorical definition of religion, 'not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes'.¹⁸ Knowledge about religion is, from this perspective, performative, in that it functions to create the objects that it claims to discover and describe.¹⁹

The meaning of religion is understood here to be constructed in at least four major ways. First of all, religion carries various associative meanings that are invoked when the concept is used in a variety of contexts. In final chapter, it will be noted that Blair ascribed his reluctance to speak about religion while he was Prime Minister of the U.K. to the connotations of eccentricity, messianism, divisiveness and hypocrisy that religion carried in the British context. Secondly, the intension of religion is constructed – the kind of thing religion is, whether it is a type of belief, ritual or discourse (for example), and the quality that distinguishes it as a religious belief, ritual or discourse. This might be transactions with superhuman beings, reference to 'the Real' and so on. The third way in which discourses construct religion is through specifying the range of objects that are included or excluded from the reference of the term. To give an example here, one might include Buddhism and Zoroastrianism, while excluding witchcraft and ballroom dancing. The fourth sense is that the internal classification of religion, for instance between inclusive and exclusive forms of religion, moderate and extremist religion.

Naming and defining religion is not only productive of the meaning of religion, it is understood here as a political practice. Discourses of religion define 'normal' or 'authentic' religion, shape orientations towards the presence of religion and its role in politics, affect what can legitimately be said and done from a religious standpoint, and who can speak and act with authority on religion. Alongside the politics *about* religion, in which the identity of true, authentic, acceptable or tolerable modes of religion is defined and contested, there is a politics *through* religion. Defining religion can serve the purposes

¹⁷ Adrian Ivakhiv, 'Toward a Geography of "Religion": Mapping the Distribution of an Unstable Signifier', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* vol. 96, no. 1 (2006), pp. 169-170.

¹⁸ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* p. 29.

¹⁹ Taylor, 'Introduction', pp. 6-7.

of political projects. Religion might form part of a classificatory system facilitating the management of colonised populations, it might be part of the strategies adopted as part of missionary projects, or 'normal' religion might be constructed as that which is compatible with the construction of a specific political order.²⁰

This thesis examines how conceptions of religion have been shaped by their articulation within liberal responses to religious violence, what I am calling here 'strategies of security'. The importance of focusing on security discourses derives not only from the contemporary connection between religion and violence in public debate, but also from the centrality of security as a value in liberal societies. It will be argued in the first chapter that security has historically been an overriding concern of liberal political theory, and that a testament to its salience on the contemporary political landscape is the frequency with which it is invoked in political debate. Furthermore, framing an issue as a matter of security often involves the claim that it is necessary to break free of the normal political constraints such as democratic and legal procedures to deal with a particular problem.²¹ Security framing can potentially legitimise all kinds of things that would otherwise be prohibited, such as intervention in religion by political authorities.

Clarification is necessary at this point on how security, the second major concept of the thesis, is being conceived. The meaning of security, like religion, is constructed discursively. It is being understood here, however, in the near-ubiquitous conventional sense of the term, as referring to the condition of safety, of being protected from or not exposed to danger.²² Beyond this basic conventional sense, security acquires more specific meanings as it is put to work in the context of world politics.²³ This specific content comprises the specification of a referent object that is worthy of protection, the definition of a range of dangers that actually or potentially threaten that object, and a

²⁰ William T. Cavanaugh, '"A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House": The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State', *Modern Theology* vol. 11, no. 4 (1995); Chidester, 'Anchoring Religion in the World: A Southern African History of Comparative Religion'; Derek R. Peterson, 'Gambling with God: Rethinking Religion in Colonial Central Kenya', in Derek R. Peterson and Darren R. Walhof (eds.), *The Invention of Religion* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

²¹ Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1998); Ole Wæver, 'Securitisation and Desecuritisation', in Ronnie D. Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

²² I emphasise near-ubiquitous, because as James Der Derian and the *Oxford English Dictionary* have shown, even this basic sense of security is one of a number of meanings the term has been imbued with historically. James Der Derian, 'The Value of Security: Hobbes, Marx, Nietzsche and Baudrillard', in David Campbell and Michael Dillon (eds.), *The Political Subject of Violence* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993). See also Ole Wæver, 'Peace and Security: Two Concepts and their Relationship', in Stefano Guzzini and Dietrich Jung (eds.), *Contemporary Security Analysis and Copenhagen Peace Research* (London: Routledge, 2004).

²³ Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 100-101.

recommendation as to how the security of this object can best be assured – a strategy of security. These strategies involve certain presuppositions about the conditions of political life within which security is sought. In this sense, security is understood here as a derivative concept, dependent for its specific content on ‘different underlying understandings of the character and purpose of politics’.²⁴

The security discourses that this thesis is interested in are governed by the underlying understandings provided by the liberal tradition of political thought. The basic meaning of security that forms the backdrop to liberal reflections on religion is as a negative condition of freedom for the individual from sudden and aggressive violations of his or her life, property and liberty.²⁵ Security is a condition of individuals, but is ensured through collective projects, primarily the state or the institution of the market. In the fourth and fifth chapters, it is argued that the emergence of recognisably modern concepts of religion was closely connected to a movement towards this conception of security, and away from an older Christian conception of social peace as realised through the Church.

The importance of understanding the intersection of religion with security in *liberal* thought derives from its position as the hegemonic political discourse on Western societies. Political debate and the conduct of government take place, for the most part, against a set of liberal background assumptions that are often taken for granted.²⁶ Liberalism is understood here as a tradition consisting of discourses that seek to define the conditions of human interaction and affiliation, the purpose and proper character of the institutions that regulate this association, as well as instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a series of political practices, including those connected to government and citizenship. The notion of tradition used here is borrowed from Alasdair MacIntyre, which means that liberalism is understood to be constituted by a continuity of

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 109, 150-160. See also Ken Booth, 'Critical Explorations', in Ken Booth (ed.), *Critical Security Studies and World Politics* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2005); Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams, 'From Strategy to Security: Foundations of Critical Security Studies', in Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams (eds.), *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (London: UCL Press, 1997); R.B.J. Walker, 'Security, Sovereignty, and the Challenge of World Politics', *Alternatives* vol. 15, no. 1 (1990); R.B.J. Walker, 'The Subject of Security', in Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams (eds.), *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (London: UCL Press, 1997); Richard Wyn Jones, *Security, Strategy, and Critical Theory* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1999).

²⁵ Emma Rothschild, 'What is Security?' *Daedalus* vol. 124, no. 3 (1995). On the history of the concept see also Wæver, 'Peace and Security: Two Concepts and their Relationship'.

²⁶ Anthony Arblaster, *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984); Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, ed. Arnold Davidson, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

argument over its character and purpose rather than an unchanging set of moral and political values.²⁷

There are, however, some distinctive features of the liberal tradition that can be identified for the purposes of this thesis, even if it is recognised that the relative importance and meaning of these elements is subject to dispute. Liberalism is taken to value individual freedom, security, government founded in consent, along with practices of tolerance and the respect for the rule of law within society to prevent unwarranted infractions of liberty by other individuals or the state. From these commitments flow a valuation of democracy, limited government and the free market.²⁸ Liberal political arrangements are represented as founded on and necessitated by universal, tradition-independent principles to which all rational individuals can assent. These norms are derived from a conception of the human being as an individual with no specific *telos*, considered in abstraction from all contingent features such as birth, race, wealth and social status. The principles constructed on this basis are held by liberals to enable those with differing conceptions of the good life to live together a society that has no overarching conception of the good, but provides the conditions of security and freedom within which individual can live out his or her own conception of the good unless it involves reshaping the community in accordance with it.

The analysis of how religion and security come together in liberal thinking does not aspire to provide a comprehensive account of liberal orientations towards religion. The aim is rather to discuss works that represent key moments in the emergence of particular ways of thinking about religion. In chapters 4 and 5, the focus is on figures associated with early liberalism, from its immediate precursors in the sixteenth century through to Adam Smith in the late eighteenth century. The final chapter discusses Tony Blair's representation of Islam as an illustration of the contemporary role of liberal security discourse in the authorisation of particular conceptions of religion. The concentration on early and contemporary instances of liberalism is determined by the fact that it has been during these periods that the relationship between religion and security has been discussed as a problem.

A further important concept here is discourse. The approach adopted is an analysis of the discourses through which 'religion' is constituted as an object of knowledge. By discourse, I am meaning a systematic set of social relations within which subjects and objects are projected as being things in their own right, and endowed with a

²⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988), pp. 326-348.

²⁸ Arblaster, *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism*, pp. 38-91.

partially-fixed meaning.²⁹ Discourse is the context within which both knowledges and subjectivities are produced; that is, the beliefs, concepts and values that constitute a culture, and the self-understandings and self-evaluations of persons.³⁰ It is ‘the representation and constitution of the “real”’.³¹ As will become clear, examining the discourses through which the identities of religion and its various expressions are constituted can result in somewhat abstract analysis, yet it is precisely at this abstract level that the most fundamental organising thought-forms of a culture are sustained. Change at this level – and perhaps only change that involves this level – can result in fundamental transformations in social and political practice.³² Furthermore, what is at stake in these abstract debates concerns issues that are likely to be at the centre of tensions in international politics in the coming decades.

For the analysis here, the thesis draws on three main sets of texts as source material. The first is the literature on religion in international politics. The second is a combination of primary and secondary texts on liberal political theory, and the third is the speeches, articles, press conferences and public statements of Tony Blair during his time as Prime Minister of the UK. The analysis does not purport to be value-free, but is informed, as may be evident at a number of points, by a certain preference for Christianity understood as a social project rather than simply a set of speculative beliefs or ethical values.

This raises a final point concerning the place of Christianity in a project concerned with discourses of ‘religion’. Arguments about the problematic nature of these discourses are often made here with reference to competing versions of that tradition. These discourses would doubtless appear problematic, and perhaps differently so, from the perspective of other traditions. But there are several reasons that can be offered in defence of the somewhat narrow perspective here. First of all, a basic reason is pragmatic: Christianity is the tradition I am most familiar with. A second is that the particular form taken by modern modes of conceptualising religion can only be understood with reference to the Christian context of their emergence. Thirdly, probing their limitations

²⁹ See Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 100-112; Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed (London: Verso, 2001), pp. 105-114. See also Jennifer Milliken, ‘The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods’, *European Journal of International Relations* vol. 5, no. 2 (1999).

³⁰ Graham Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 63.

³¹ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, 2nd ed (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 6-7.

³² I take this to be a central argument of John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

from the perspective of different forms of Christianity exposes more clearly just how partial and contested they are. If even some Christians would have difficulty accepting them, how much harder will it be for those of non-Christian traditions?³³

Thesis structure

The thesis is divided into two Parts, of three chapters each. Part I identifies the contours of what I call the modern discourse of religion, which, as has been stated, involves two assumptions. The first is that religion is a genus of which the religions are species, and the second is that religion is one among a number of spheres of life. Chapter 1 introduces the idea of religion as a discursive construction whose meaning is the object of political contestation. Locating the thesis in relation to recent work that has explored the question of religion and security in International Politics, it argues that this literature has mostly treated the meaning of religion as a definitional problem to be got out of the way before the analysis of politics can begin, rather than a political problem in its own right. It situates IP debates over religion and violence in the wider political context of the politics *about* religion, and proposes that this politics goes right down to the constitution of the concept within discourse. The chapter concludes by identifying two assumptions in the literature on religion in IP that are argued to be characteristic of what is called here the ‘modern discourse of religion’ – assumptions at the heart of the contemporary politics *about* religion.

These two assumptions are so widely taken for granted that it is worth subjecting them to critical examination. The second and third chapters represent a ground-clearing operation before Part II, in which these assumptions are denaturalised and their problematic features discussed. It is argued that unless the politically contested character of these two assumptions are recognised, IP scholars risk obscuring the politics embedded in their own representations of religion. Chapter 2 explores the assumption that religion is a separate domain of human practice, distinct from politics, economics, science and so on. It argues that assuming this to be a universal feature of religion is to take up the standpoint of Western, liberal modernity. The differentiation of religion is neither universal nor timeless, but arose out of the secularisation process understood as the invention of religion, politics, and economics as spheres with their own characteric

³³ A point made by Charles Taylor about secularism. Charles Taylor, 'Modes of Secularism', in Rajeev Bhargava (ed.), *Secularism and its Critics* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 38.

logics. However, it is proposed that this differentiation is directly contested by the resurgence of politically assertive religious groups. Understanding secularisation as a process of discursive production directs attention towards the discourses in which the identities of the various spheres are defined and distinguished. This task is taken up again in chapter 4.

Chapter 3, meanwhile, further problematises the modern discourse of religion by investigating the assumption that religion is a genus. While chapter 2 argues that the differentiation of religion is directly contested in the politics *about* religion, this chapter argues that the notion of religion as a genus encourages a specific mode of controversy. The chapter makes two arguments. The first is that religion is an essentially contested concept sharing the same problems of definition as any such notion. The second is that there is a specific problem in defining religion that not only makes it problematic as an analytical category, but suggests that the concept will always remain contested. This problem is the absence of any shared features that ‘the religions’ hold in common – features that are simultaneously specific enough to mark of religion as a domain of life alongside others. Attempts to define religion tend to be so open that it becomes difficult not to extend the category indefinitely, or they narrowly privilege the features of one tradition as being characteristic of religion as such. This suggests that the very notion of religion as a genus is likely to remain a source of political conflict, as there can be no definition with any specific content that adequately describes all that people conventionally want to call ‘religion’. This in turn raises the question of how religion came to be imagined in these terms, if this is so empirically questionable? This issue is taken up in chapter 5.

Part I makes a case for understanding the politics *about* religion as being a struggle over the most basic meanings of the term, and identified two assumptions that are themselves important foci of this conflict. It argued that these assumptions should be treated with caution, given their empirical limitations and implication in the politics *about* religion. Part II examines the close connections between liberalism, security and the modern discourse of religion. It is argued that these two assumptions about religion derive from earlier strategies of security, in which solutions to the violence of religious conflict was sought through defining politics as non-religious and searching for common features shared by the religions of the world. It argues in addition that in the present day, the prevalence of the modern discourse of religion, with its two central assumptions, continues to make such security strategies seem possible and natural. It does this through

examining the work of some key authors illustrative of important transitions, rather than by attempting to provide a comprehensive account of the construction of religion within liberal thought.

Chapter 4 takes up and extends the argument developed in Part I, and especially in chapter 2, examining the how the the differentiation of religion in the seventeenth century served a politico-security project. It proposes that by limiting the expression of religion to non-political spheres, and justifying this move in terms of liberating the essence of religion to be religion, uncontaminated by politics, it fostered the assumption that religion is one dimension of life alongside others. A second argument of this chapter is that the differentiation of religion involved the secularisation of security. Security could now stand as a supposedly impartial measure against which to judge and classify all particular manifestations of religion. It is argued that the derivative nature of security means that it is is never as neutral as it purports to be, and that there can be no neutral standpoint from which to define what it means to be secure or at peace, or what endangers that state.

Chapter 5, also bulding on the arguments of Part I, takes up the problem identified in chapter 3. It argues that the problematic notion of religion as a genus emerged at a time when there was very little reliable information about non-Christian traditions, but an urgent need for religious unity. It arose out of the search for a lowest common denominator that could unite the religions, yet still provide the kind of minimal religious faith that was believed necessary to sustain obedience to the law. The important legacy of this strategy resides not only in its contribution to the notion of religion as a genus, but in the persistent ideal of mitigating religious tension by uniting around features common to religion as such. The exclusions and concealed premises of early articulations of the ‘common ground’ strategy cast an important light on more recent invocations of it. It is argued that they repeat the difficulties involved in attempts to to define religion as a genus, but that the problems are amplified by the requirement that believers must also accept this shared ground as the most fundamental part of their faith.

A further noteworthy point is the compatibility of the common ground strategy with liberal conceptions of peace and security as realised through the state and the market rather than the concrete practices and social forms of a religious tradition. Here the common ground strategy converges with the differentiation of religion, for once the crucial features of the religions have been defined in terms vague and general enough to serve the purposes of the common ground, the politically-relevant content of religion is

too thin to sustain any substantial social project. The realisation of value such as peace and justice shared by the religious traditions must proceed within the terms of the liberal democratic state and capitalist market, effectively reinscribing a secular differentiation of spheres.

Chapter 6 examines Tony Blair's representation of the problem of Islam and security in his speeches and public statements during his time as a Prime Minister of the UK. The aim here is to provide an illustration of how the common ground and differentiated religion discourses remain important modes of interpreting and responding to religion in the twenty-first century, rather than providing a comprehensive case study. Blair, it is proposed, interpreted the problem of Islam and security through a conception of religion indebted to the common ground strategy, but his approach also highlights how close the common ground strategy is to the idea of differentiated religion. His solution called, in classic 'common ground' fashion, for religious unity based on shared human values as the most important part of religion, with doctrinal differences being less significant secondary matters. At the same time though, the operations of the public realms of politics and economics within which Blair envisaged the realisation of these values were conceived as secular, objective realities. Religion simply existed here to provide the individual believer with a moral inspiration to cooperate for the common good within the limited terms of the liberal democratic state and the market. Blair divided religion into moderate and extremist forms, a dichotomy based on whether a particular expression of religion conformed to the 'moderate' ideal of furthering human values, but also whether they were compatible with the realisation of freedom, security and prosperity through the liberal government Blair advocated.

The conclusion draws together the insights of the various chapters, summarising the response to the question and the ways in which the three aims of the project have been realised. It emphasises the importance of attending to the discursive construction of 'religion', the political consequences of representing religion in various ways, and the politics *about* religion within which these discourses attempt to authoritatively define the meaning of the beliefs, actions and institutions associated with religion. It recommends that those who study and practice international politics must attend to problems raised in the thesis, for two reasons. First of all, because all statements about religion feed into the ongoing process of discursive contestation through which the meaning of religion is negotiated, and scholars and practitioners are no exception here. Secondly though, they should take notice because these issues are likely to be at the centre of important disputes

in world where religious traditions are playing an increasingly active role. The argument made in this thesis suggests that our inherited conceptual vocabulary may be unable to sustain the kind of creative thinking necessary to resolve the tensions likely to arise. It is not only indebted to seventeenth-century responses to seventeenth-century circumstances, but is also bound up with the justification of a liberal order that has itself become contentious, as well as being oriented to managing relations between religions rather than conflict between those with different conceptions of religion.

PART I

THE POLITICS ABOUT 'RELIGION'

1 SECURITY AND THE MEANING OF 'RELIGION' IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

This chapter introduces the idea of religion as a category constructed within discourse whose meaning is a focus of political struggle. It seeks to locate the thesis in relation to the work of scholars who have sought to bring religion as an object of study into international politics, and particularly those concerned with so-called religious violence and security issues. It argues that debates over the connection between religion and violence feed into political struggle over the proper boundaries, character and role of religion in modern Western societies. However, it is argued here that this 'politics *about* religion' goes right down to the constitution of the concept itself within discourse. It represents a struggle over the meaning of religion, played out through competing discourses that seek to define what makes the beliefs and practices of a tradition *religious*. The chapter begins by outlining the terms of the debate over the return of religion and its relationship with violence. The second section introduces the idea that competing perspectives on religion in world politics are structured by different interpretive frames through which the meaning of events are constructed. The third section outlines the understanding of religion as a discursive construct presupposed in this thesis. The final section shifts the focus to security as a concern behind the articulation of particular discourses of religion, and identifies two dimensions of the modern imagination of religion that the second and third chapters will seek to denaturalise and politicise.

1.1 Competing Perspectives on Religious Violence

It was noted in the introduction that the persistence and political assertiveness that much of the literature on religion in International Politics has sought to introduce religion as a factor that can help explain or transform the central social and political phenomena that scholars in the discipline have traditionally sought to explain. Perhaps the central problem of world politics is that of peace and security, and much of the focus on religion has concerned its role in domestic and international conflict. In this regard, academic inquiry has mirrored a more general public anxiety about the apparently violent propensities of religion. For some, this concern had been generated by real world events.

Susanne Hoeber Rudolph has argued that 'The relevance of transnational religions to security, not obvious in the mid-1980s, came to seem more plausible with the approach of the 1990s, as domestic tranquillity and international peace were increasingly disrupted in the name of religion'.¹ With the confounding of expectations regarding secularisation, the confessional character of the conflict in Northern Ireland began to seem less like an exceptional survival from an earlier age and more like a portent of things to come. Islam became a central object of concern in the West following the Iranian revolution. Islamic political movements had grown in strength throughout the Muslim-majority world, gaining power not only in Iran, but also in Sudan, Afghanistan and briefly Tajikistan. Sunnis had converged on Afghanistan to fight the Soviets during the 1980s, returning home with the motivation and expertise for violent campaigns against their own governments in Egypt, Tunisia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. This wave of conflict justified in the name of Islam culminated in the attacks of 11 September 2001. Other traditions were also implicated in violence: Hindu nationalists and Sikh separatists in India, Buddhists in Sri Lanka, the Aum Shinrikyo cult in Japan, and Christian sects in the United States were all active. Religious identity also seemed to be a factor in nationalist, civil or ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, Nigeria, and Sri Lanka, among others.

To what extent can one say that these conflicts were driven by religion though? This was a question Tony Blair had to take a position on, initially in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, but even more urgently after the London bombings of 7 July 2005. Comments such as that made by Eva Bellin that it was 'real world events' that had made religion a significant object of study,² or the line of argument that policymakers have to 'come to terms...with the new realities of religious warfare'³ seem to imply that it is obvious that religion is a significant factor in this violence. However, academic and public opinion has tended to divide over the issue, and debate has revolved around the relative importance of and relationship between religious and material factors in motivating conflict. Alongside debate over the causes of violence in which religion is implicated there has been a second debate about whether religious conflicts are more violent and intractable than secular disputes. All sides in these debates tended to assume that there is some kind of consensus over what religion is that can form the basis of a meaningful discussion.

¹ Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, 'Religion, States, and Transnational Civil Society', in Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and James Piscatori (eds.), *Transnational Religion and Fading States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 3-4.

² Bellin, 'Faith in Politics: New Trends in the Study of Religion and Politics', p. 315.

³ Pauletta Otis, 'Religion and War in the Twenty-first Century', in Robert A. Seiple and Dennis Hoover (eds.), *Religion and Security: The New Nexus in International Relations* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), p. 19.

The source of religious violence

There have certainly been many arguing that religion has been the root of the problem, some contending even that it tends towards violence by its very nature. Sam Harris has written that 'Religious violence is still with us because our religions are *intrinsically* hostile to one another. Where they appear otherwise, it is because secular knowledge and secular interests are restraining the most lethal improprieties of faith'.⁴ Christopher Hitchens similarly proposed that its violent proclivities had made religion 'a threat to human survival'.⁵ 'To fill a world with religion', Richard Dawkins wrote after the World Trade Centre attacks, 'is like littering the streets with loaded guns. Do not be surprised if they are used'.⁶ Another commentary on the same event speculated that 'It seems almost as if there is something inherent in religious monotheism that lends itself to this kind of terrorist temptation. And our bland attempts to ignore this – to speak of this violence as if it did not have religious roots – is some kind of denial'.⁷ A key theme in these arguments has been the idea that 'the sleep of reason breeds monsters'. The abandonment of reason supposedly demanded by religious faith is said to make all kinds of violence and cruelty possible. The polemics of these authors make the mistake of treating the crudest fundamentalisms as the most orthodox representatives of their respective traditions, but their depiction of religion as an irrational and barbaric throwback to a more primitive age has been popular in Britain.

Among those who regard religion as significant, not all have agreed that religion or the fact of religious diversity inevitably tends towards violence. Many scholars have been inclined to emphasise the ambivalent nature of religion in conflict situations, arguing that it could be both a wellspring of violence, and a source of peace.⁸ Nevertheless, there has been considerable effort put in to understanding the role of religion in conflict. Religion and security, according to the editors of one recent book,

⁴ Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2005), p. 225.

⁵ Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007), p. 25.

⁶ Richard Dawkins, 'Religion's Misguided Missiles', *Guardian*, 15 September 2001. See also Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Transworld, 2006).

⁷ Andrew Sullivan, 'This is a Religious War', *New York Times*, 7 October 2001.

⁸ e.g. R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000); Marc Gopin, 'Religion, Violence, and Conflict Resolution', *Peace & Change* vol. 22, no. 1 (1997); Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*; Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations*, pp. 121-196.

has become 'the new nexus in international relations'.⁹ Pauletta Otis, contributing to that volume, confidently predicted that 'The twenty-first century will be a time of religious violence and warfare...Although religion has long been recognised as one factor, among many, relevant to discussions of security and warmaking...it is now emerging (or rather, rather, re-emerging) as the single most important political-ideological default mechanism in global conflict'.¹⁰ She proceeded to propose that 'whether religion is treated as causal in ideological explanations, or as a contributing factor to other variables, it is an integral piece of the security puzzle and, as such, deserves focused attention'.¹¹

Otis concentrates on making the case for the relevance of religion to security matters rather than developing a detailed account of how religious violence might be understood. Scott Thomas has provided a more focused study, drawing on the work of French philosopher and anthropologist Rene Girard. Thomas argues that religious violence can be understood as obeying a specific cultural logic, in which the sacrifice of a scapegoat channels violent social rivalry that might otherwise destroy the community into an acceptable violence directed at a sacred, substitutionary victim. It performs a social function through which the rivalries, jealousies and quarrels within a society can be vented to prevent their internal circulation and escalation.¹²

A number of studies investigated the resurgence of religious clashes empirically.¹³ The problem has also been approached more theoretically: For example Laustsen and Wæver explored the security dynamics distinctive to religion, and Friedrich Kratochwil has investigated the conditions under which 'fundamentalism' turns to violence.¹⁴ Richard Falk argues that religious conflict is the result of a tendency within the religions to insist on an exclusivist conception of salvation, meaning the belief that there is only one true path, all others leading to failure and futility.¹⁵

⁹ Robert A. Seiple and Dennis Hoover, (eds.), *Religion and Security: The New Nexus in International Relations* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

¹⁰ Otis, 'Religion and War in the Twenty-first Century', p. 11.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 13.

¹² Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations*, pp. 121-148.

¹³ Tanja Ellingsen, 'Toward a Revival of Religion and Religious Clashes?' *Terrorism and Political Violence* vol. 17, no. 3 (2005); Jonathan Fox, 'Are Religious Minorities more Militant than Other Ethnic Minorities?' *Alternatives* vol. 28, no. 1 (2003); Jonathan Fox, 'The Rise of Religious Nationalism and Conflict: Ethnic Conflict and Revolutionary Wars, 1945-2001', *Journal of Peace Research* vol. 41, no. 6 (2004).

¹⁴ Kratochwil, 'Religion and (Inter-)National Politics: On the Heuristics of Identities, Structures, and Agents'; Carsten B. Laustsen and Ole Wæver, 'In Defence of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization', *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* vol. 29, no. 3 (2000).

¹⁵ Richard Falk, 'A Worldwide Religious Resurgence in an Era of Globalisation and Apocalyptic Terrorism', in Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopoulos (eds.), *Religion in International Relations: The Return From Exile* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

During the last three decades, studies have begun to explore the phenomenon of 'religious terrorism' and the ways in which it differed from its secular counterpart.¹⁶ In an influential article, David Rapoport argued that the 11 September attacks were part of a 'fourth wave' of terrorism beginning around 1979, whose distinguishing feature was religion.¹⁷ Magnus Ranstorp wrote that such organisations are driven by day-to-day practical political considerations and hence it can be 'difficult for the general observer to separate and distinguish between the political and the religious sphere of these terrorist groups', but also helpfully added that 'religious terrorists are, by their very nature, motivated by religion'.¹⁸ He proposed that religious violence is a defensive reaction to the identity and faith of the believers, and that such struggle is appealing to the disenfranchised and oppressed to whom it offers a sense of power.

Their contributions fed into a related debate surrounding the thesis that violence was especially likely in the context of irreducible religious diversity. The most controversial expression of this idea was Samuel Huntington's claim that in the post-Cold War world, ideological confrontation was being replaced by conflict motivated by religious and cultural tensions.¹⁹ For Huntington, it was religio-cultural similarities and differences that would determine the alliances and fault-lines of world politics in the century to come. Violence would be between representatives of religiously-defined civilisations that shared little in common culturally.²⁰ He argued that non-Western societies were turning away from social forms such as secularism inherited from Judeo-Christian culture of the West.²¹ Nigeria, Bosnia, Indonesia and Malaysia, along with other countries whose territories straddled the boundaries between different civilisations, were likely to experience conflict between different sections of their population with rival and incompatible worldviews. Domestic conflict along civilisational fault-lines would be likely to escalate as third-parties intervened to aid their co-religionists.²² Some accepted Huntington's basic argument, hailing it as prescient in the wake of 11 September, and

¹⁶ Hoffman, 'Holy Terror': The Implications of a Terrorism Motivated by Religion'; Ranstorp, 'Terrorism in the Name of Religion'; Rapoport, 'Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions'.

¹⁷ David Rapoport, 'The Fourth Wave: September 11th in the History of Terrorism', *Current History* vol., no. 650 (2001).

¹⁸ Ranstorp, 'Terrorism in the Name of Religion', p. 44.

¹⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?' *Foreign Affairs* vol. 72, no. 3 (1993); Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

²⁰ For Huntington, 'religion is a central defining characteristic of civilisations, and, as Christopher Dawson said, "the great religions are the foundations on which the great civilisations rest."' Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, p. 47.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 95-101.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 207-298.

sought to explore ways of mitigating the problem he identified.²³ Others were more critical. The empirical accuracy of his argument was tested and disputed,²⁴ and scholars also raised more fundamental questions about the simplistic assumptions Huntington was making about the existence of homogenous 'civilizations' with unitary and essential identities.²⁵

A variation on the argument that violence is rooted in religion is the claim that a particular religious tradition – invariably Islam – is a problem. An especially controversial feature of Huntington's argument was the claim that the nature of Islam made it particularly inclined to war with its civilisational neighbours.²⁶ Islam had bloody borders and bloody innards, he proposed, for a number of reasons. The proximity of Muslim and non-Muslim peoples in many parts of the world, the absence of a core state in the Islamic world to mediate conflicts within Islam, and demographic explosion in Muslim societies all helped to explain Muslim violence. However, there were also problems with Islam as a faith: it was, he proposed, 'a religion of the sword' that glorified military virtues and had few prohibitions on violence. It made sharp distinctions between Muslims and non-Muslims and merged religion and politics.²⁷ The historian Bernard Lewis, who coined the 'clash of civilizations' phrase, also expressed similar views on the problematic nature of Islam.²⁸ Lewis argued that Islam was more closely connected with violence than other faiths because they did not separate religion and politics, as Christians had learned to do.

Not everybody has agreed that religion is a significant factor in contemporary conflict though. A second group has denied the relevance of religion to modern conflict, either for theoretical reasons or on the basis that religion – or their own religion – is essentially benign. Consider the different accounts presented of the motivation of the September 11 hijackers. It was claimed by many that the World Trade Centre attacks

²³ Jonathan Sacks, 'The Dignity of Difference - How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations', *Orbis* vol. 46, no. 4 (2002).

²⁴ Giacomo Chiozzo, 'Is There a Clash of Civilisations? Evidence from Patterns of International Conflict Involvement, 1946-97', *Journal of Peace Research* vol. 39, no. 6 (2002); Jonathan Fox, 'Two Civilisations and Ethnic Conflict: Islam and the West', *Journal of Peace Research* vol. 38, no. 4 (2001); Errol A. Henderson and Richard Tucker, 'Clear and Present Strangers: The Clash of Civilisations and International Conflict', *International Studies Quarterly* vol. 45, no. 2 (2001); Bruce M. Russett, John R. Oneal, and Michaelene Cox, 'Clash of Civilisations, or Realism and Liberalism Déjà Vu? Some Evidence', *Journal of Peace Research* vol. 37, no. 5 (2000).

²⁵ Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Civilization' on Trial', *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* vol. 28, no. 1 (1999); Edward Said, 'The Clash of Ignorance', *The Nation*, 22 October 2001.

²⁶ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, pp. 254-265.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 263-265.

²⁸ Bernard Lewis, 'The Roots of Muslim Rage', *Policy* vol. 17, no. 4 (2001). First published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in September 1990.

should not be understood in terms of Islam, or religion at all.²⁹ Some argued on the basis of claims about the true nature of Islam, reasoning syllogistically that Islam was a peaceful religion, the attacks were violent, ergo Islam had nothing to do with the attacks. King Abdullah of Jordan, for example, insisted that 'This is not a battle between moderate Moslems and extremist Moslems, because there is no such thing as moderate Moslems. There is Islam and there are extremists who have hijacked this religion'.³⁰ Religion was here the victim rather than the perpetrator.

The arguments of those who sought to distance religion from violent acts were bolstered by those who saw social and political factors as more fundamental determinants of conflict.³¹ Religion was here treated as a dependent rather than an independent variable, epiphenomenal in relation to supposedly more basic material concerns, providing a language through which these concerns could be expressed. It was argued that the hijackers and those who sympathised with them were animated by material grievances generated by the failure of governments in the Middle East to deliver on economic growth and social mobility, or political resentment of the scope and character of U.S. interference in the Middle East.³² The standpoint here is that expressed in the phrase 'the use of religion for political purposes',³³ and assumes that once social, economic and political problems are resolved, religious politics would no longer be a problem. Neither Islam, nor any kind of religion, should be accorded the status of an independent variable.

There have therefore been two basic poles in the debate over religion and violence. There are those for whom religion is a vital force in itself shaping outcomes in international politics, and those for whom the involvement of religion in politics registers more fundamental socio-economic dislocations and inequalities. In practice, some combination of perspectives is possible: not all of those who regard material interests and social, political and economic inequalities as the major determinants of conflict have

²⁹ Mark Juergensmeyer, 'Does Religion Cause Terrorism?' in *National Policy Forum on Terrorism, Security and America's Purpose: Towards a More Comprehensive Strategy* (Washington, DC: 2005); McTernan, *Violence in God's Name: Religion in an Age of Conflict*, pp. 20-21.

³⁰ King Abdullah of Jordan, 'Doorstep Interview between the Prime Minister and King Abdullah of Jordan, 9 November 2001', <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page1645.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

³¹ For examples of this approach applied to ethno-political and civil wars, see Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, 'Greed and Grievance in Civil War' (The World Bank Development Research Group, 2000); Ted Robert Gurr, 'Peoples Against States: Ethno-political Conflict and the Changing World System', *International Studies Quarterly* vol. 38, no. 3 (1994).

³² For this argument see Peter Beaumont, 'The Roots of Islamic Anger', *Observer*, 14 October 2001; Noam Chomsky, 'Drain The Swamp And There Will Be No More Mosquitoes', *Guardian*, 9 September 2002; Sohail Hashmi, 'The Terrorists' Zealotry is Political not Religious', *Washington Post*, 30 September 2001.

³³ Juergensmeyer, 'Does Religion Cause Terrorism?'

denied that religion has any significance. Religion can be a resource used instrumentally by elites to mobilise a community and generate support for a cause.³⁴ Within this model, essentially secular conflicts over values or interests are fuelled by being represented by elites as religious conflicts in order to secure the support of the faithful rank and file. Audrey Cronin has argued that the reverse relationship operates as well though, as an 'elite' intent on pursuing a violent strategy for religious reasons exploit political grievances to mobilise support. In a discussion of Al-Qaeda, she distinguishes between the current crop of terrorists who are 'religious fanatics' and the 'far more politically motivated states, entities, and people who would support them because they feel powerless and left behind in a globalizing world'.³⁵ Thus even those who see conflict as usually sustained by self-interest rather than religious ideals still regard religion as a relevant 'intervening variable'.

A prominent theorist advocating this combined approach is Mark Juergensmeyer. In the early 1990s, he explored the possibility of a 'new Cold War' between religious nationalist movements and the secular state following the collapse of the Soviet Bloc.³⁶ The failure of secular states to live up to their promises of political freedom, social equality and economic prosperity resulted in alienation, marginalisation and social frustration. These grievances might once have been expressed through secular ideologies such as Marxism, but are now finding an outlet through religious ideologies, and protest is organised by religious leaders through religious institutions. The initial grievances are not religious, he contends, but they are given meaning and clarity through being seen in religious terms. The consequence was a collision of religious and secular nationalisms, he argued, that represented competing and mutually exclusive ideologies, each claiming ultimate authority to define legitimate social order.

The expression of these grievances in religious terms is problematic, Juergensmeyer proposes, for symbolic narratives of 'cosmic war' can be found at the heart of religion.³⁷ For this reason, it was not surprising that a number of religious nationalist movements had involved violence. He argued that what was really surprising, given this violent element at the heart of religion, was that so many other religious

³⁴ Andreas Hasenclever and Volker Rittberger, 'Does Religion Make a Difference? Theoretical Approaches to the Impact of Faith on Political Conflict', in Pavlos Hatzopoulos and Fabio Petito (eds.), *Religion in International Relations: The Return From Exile* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

³⁵ Cronin, 'Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism', p. 38.

³⁶ Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*.

³⁷ This argument has been developed more fully in Mark Juergensmeyer, 'Terror Mandated by God', *Terrorism and Political Violence* vol. 9, no. 2 (1997); Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*; Juergensmeyer, 'Does Religion Cause Terrorism?'

nationalist movements have been peaceful in their aims and methods. These more benign movements retained the notion of a cosmic struggle between good and evil, but 'the violent potential of their struggle is tempered' because so many of them 'subscribe so deeply to democratic procedures and human rights'.³⁸ One finds here in Juergensmeyer's analysis the same theme later articulated by Sam Harris: the violent impulses of religion are only restrained by secular norms and principles. It is combined here with a model in which conflict is initially driven by material factors. The role of religion, and the specific claims made by the actors themselves, remains parasitic on the fundamental causal dynamics that are still believed to be driven by socio-economic pressures that operate in roughly the same manner universally.

The intensity of religious conflict

Juergensmeyer's analysis remains within the material causes paradigm, but suggests the admixture of religious belief with economic and social marginalisation represents an especially dangerous cocktail. The importance of more sustained investigation into the relationship between religion and violence derived, some like Juergensmeyer proposed, not only from the apparent ubiquity of religious factors in conflict situations, but also from the greater intensity of the bloodshed religion was capable of unleashing and the more intractable nature of the conflicts in which religion is significant. Juergensmeyer's arguments here contribute to the second debate over the role of religion in conflict situations. The question here is whether religion has any effect on the intensity of conflict. Does religion make it more likely that a conflict that might otherwise be resolved peacefully descends into violence? Is religious violence a peculiarly intense and unrestrained form? These two questions relate to different points on a continuum of escalation.

One version of the view that religion makes conflict more likely rests on the belief that it is not conducive to the kind of rational bargaining through which compromise is reached in secular disputes. Laustsen and Wæver have argued that religious conflicts are more intractable because they deal with non-negotiable issues less open to compromise: 'Religion deals with the constitution of being as such. Hence, one cannot be pragmatic on concerns challenging this being'.³⁹ A variation on this is

³⁸ Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*, pp. 153-170, quote at 170.

³⁹ Laustsen and Wæver, 'In Defence of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization', p. 719.

proposed by Hasenclever and Rittberger, who have argued that while most conflicts are rooted in the unequal distribution of power and wealth in a given society, the interpretation of social conflicts as religious confrontations leads to their transformation and radicalisation. The identification of the claims of one party with the will of God or 'the cosmic order' puts their superiority over competing claims beyond contestation. Opponents are demonised, and their programmes denounced as blasphemous. Parties are less likely to trust each other in a religious conflict, as opponents are seen as ministers of evil, but they are more likely to be willing to make greater sacrifices in the service of the cause.

They are also likely, Hasenclever and Rittberger argue, to be more ready to sacrifice other people in the service of the cause. They comment that in religious confrontations, 'no means seem to be illegitimate, and the adversary has no right to mercy because it has excluded itself from the God-warranted Order. One's own cause, by contrast, is sacred and its fulfilment serves the true peace. This will be achieved when the adversary is annihilated and the true believers are again able to live in agreement with their faith'.⁴⁰ The idea here is that when conflicts have escalated into violence, that violence is likely to be more ferocious when religion is involved.

An influential statement of this claim was made by the prominent terrorism scholar Bruce Hoffman in 1993.⁴¹ He argued that secular terrorists pursue 'utilitarian' goals, aiming to reform the political system to bring about the greatest benefits for the greatest number. They regard violence as a means to an end, tend to consider indiscriminate violence as immoral and counterproductive, and they are restrained by a constituency they claim to speak for, composed of actual and potential sympathisers acting as a restraint on their actions. According to Hoffman, 'holy terror' was an altogether different breed to its secular counterpart, because its perpetrators are unrestrained by political or moral considerations that constrain secular terrorists. Religious terrorists seek benefits only for themselves and their co-religionists, they have no audience to restrain them outside the membership of their own community, and see indiscriminate violence as an end in itself, not only necessary for the achievement of their goals but morally justified. The consequence is that unlimited violence against anybody who is not part of their religion or sect is divinely sanctioned.⁴²

⁴⁰ Hasenclever and Rittberger, 'Does Religion Make a Difference? Theoretical Approaches to the Impact of Faith on Political Conflict', p. 121.

⁴¹ Hoffman, "'Holy Terror': The Implications of a Terrorism Motivated by Religion'.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 2-3.

The secular terrorist is almost an attractive, public-spirited figure in Hoffman's analysis. Others have followed his assessment, essentially repeating his arguments. Magnus Ranstorp has written of the 'lack of any moral constraints in the use of violence' by religious terrorists.⁴³ Cronin contrasted rational secular terrorists, who were capable of 'egregious acts of barbarism', with religious terrorists, who 'may be especially dangerous to international security'.⁴⁴ The view is not confined to specialist terrorism scholars: Ted Gurr commented on the unusual intensity of religious war.⁴⁵ Otis has declared in a very similar fashion that 'as religious zealots and opportunists use the power inherent in religious ideology to escalate the forms, levels, and types of violence, there is potential for devastation and destruction previously unknown in human history'.⁴⁶ Religious conflicts, she added, 'tend to have higher levels of intensity, severity, brutality, and lethality than other forms of war'.⁴⁷

Given the unprecedented scale and brutality of twentieth century warfare driven by nationalism, racism and secular political ideologies, the claim that religious conflicts are more lethal than secular conflicts is remarkable. It is interesting, and perhaps a measure of how uncontroversial they regarded it, that none of these scholars provided any evidence for their claims. The results of those who have since set out to test the hypothesis quantitatively must be judged inconclusive, as they have coded 'religious conflict' as one in which the two parties are of different faiths.⁴⁸ This is clearly a very limited measure, as it takes no account of the substantive grievances of the parties involved, and would include conflicts such as the Falklands War.

There is more than a simple empirical observation here though – the question of whether religious violence is inevitably more intense is bound up with how one views the role of religion in escalating conflict. The claim that religious violence is more indiscriminate and brutal than secular violence is founded in the claim that religious groups are less constrained in their actions by norms of non-violence and restraint. The logical extension of this position, as Hasenclever and Rittberger have pointed out, is the idea that conflict in which religion is involved is inherently more likely to turn violent

⁴³ Ranstorp, 'Terrorism in the Name of Religion', p. 54.

⁴⁴ Cronin, 'Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism', pp. 39-42.

⁴⁵ Gurr, 'Peoples Against States: Ethnopolitical Conflict and the Changing World System', p. 364.

⁴⁶ Otis, 'Religion and War in the Twenty-first Century', p. 11.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

⁴⁸ Jonathan Fox, 'Religion and State Failure: An Examination of the Extent and Magnitude of Religious Conflict from 1950 to 1996', *International Political Science Review* vol. 25 (2004); Susanna Pearce, 'Religious Rage: A Quantitative Analysis of the Intensity of Religious Conflicts', *Terrorism and Political Violence* vol. 17, no. 3 (2005); Philip G. Roeder, 'Clash of Civilisations and the Escalation of Domestic Ethnopolitical Conflicts', *Comparative Political Studies* vol. 36, no. 5 (2003).

than secular conflict.⁴⁹ Religion is something that escalates political conflict rather than de-escalating it. The implicit assumption here is that situations involving 'politicised religion' contain a greater potential for violence.

Debate over the relationship between religion and violence has centred on whether religion is a cause of conflict, and whether the presence of religion makes it more likely that the conflict will escalate. Opinion on the latter question divides into those who believe that it does inevitably, and those for whom it can lead to escalation but can also contribute to de-escalation. The debate over the root causes of 'religious' violence has divided into those for whom it is an independent variable, and those who regard inequalities of wealth and power as fundamental. The final chapter will discuss how these two different ways of conceiving the role of religion in causing violence were both articulated by Tony Blair in his discussion of Islam. Early on, he interpreted the problem in terms of socio-economic grievances, whereas later he spoke about it as a problem of religion, albeit corrupted religion.

1.2 Responding to Religious Violence

What this discussion illustrates is that when it comes to the question of religion and conflict, debate is not simply about effective responses, but about what the problem is. There is no agreement about the causes of conflict – whether they are even religious. This is an important debate, for it determines the ways in which one orients oneself to the problem, and the kinds of solutions that seem sensible. Very different implications follow from the analyses of those who see violence at the heart of all religion, those who see violence as the effect of a corrupted religion, and those who regard religion as merely an unhelpful mask for greed or political grievances.

Those such as the so-called 'new atheists' who see religion as inexorably tending towards violence commend the abandonment and stigmatisation of beliefs that do not measure up to the canons of scientific rationality.⁵⁰ Those who see religion as potentially a force for good in the world tend to see it as part of the solution, advocating the encouragement of progressive elements within religious traditions and dialogue among

⁴⁹ Hasenclever and Rittberger, 'Does Religion Make a Difference? Theoretical Approaches to the Impact of Faith on Political Conflict', p. 113.

⁵⁰ Harris, *The End of Faith*, pp. 50-79.

faith communities.⁵¹ Richard Falk argues that peacemaking efforts can build on the constructive tendency in 'all great religions' towards a universalistic tolerance of others, which can counter the harmful effects of the regressive tendencies towards exclusivism.⁵² In contrast, if the problem is located in unjust distributions of resources or a desire for self-aggrandisement by political entrepreneurs, the remedy will involve addressing the 'enabling environment' of bad governance, poverty and inadequate structures of social opportunity that blight much of the developing world.⁵³

The question of how the problem should be defined has broader import. Discussions over the violent propensities (or otherwise) of religion are implicated in what is being called here the politics *about* religion – those public debates about the place of religious beliefs and practices in society and their proper relation to political life. Within this category one might put recent studies of secularism as a political practice. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd and Maia Carter Hallward, for example, have argued that the secular and the religious are not clearly defined and stable categories, for the acceptable role of religion in political life is constantly renegotiated and contested.⁵⁴ The boundaries are constantly being redrawn, and arguments about religion and violence contribute to this process. For example, the narrative that political religion invariably leads to violence and intolerance supports the claims of those who would exclude it from public life. Reference to contemporary atrocities is often combined with a narrative in which liberalism and the privatisation of religion were necessary responses to the Wars of Religion.⁵⁵ The associative meanings carried by religion here can also be important, shaping perceptions of religious believers and the distribution of social esteem. The association of religion with irrationality, messianism, hypocrisy and eccentricity conditions attitudes towards religious individuals and movements.

On the other hand, the denial that either religion in general or specific traditions have anything to do with violence may be prompted by a fear of violent scapegoating, as among Muslims in the wake of the 7 July bombings in London, or it may be a function of the more general contemporary desire for recognition and respect for cultural and

⁵¹ Hasenclever and Rittberger, 'Does Religion Make a Difference? Theoretical Approaches to the Impact of Faith on Political Conflict'.

⁵² Falk, 'A Worldwide Religious Resurgence in an Era of Globalisation and Apocalyptic Terrorism'.

⁵³ Cronin, 'Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism', p. 38.

⁵⁴ Maia Carter Hallward, 'Situating the "Secular": Negotiating the Boundary between Religion and Politics', *International Political Sociology* vol. 2 (2008); Hurd, 'The Political Authority of Secularism in International Relations'; Hurd, 'Theorizing Religious Resurgence'; Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*.

⁵⁵ Cavanaugh, '"A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House": The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State'.

religious particularities.⁵⁶ The question of whether religion and the religions have a propensity to incite violence and social division cannot be divorced from the politics *about* religion, for representations of religion are implicated in contemporary political struggles over secularism and multiculturalism.

These political disagreements are not easily resolvable. The question of whether religion tends towards violence, or whether a conflict is religious in nature is not obvious. Given the presence of these alternative analytical and political judgements that all read more or less the same data in quite different ways, it is not quite enough to simply state, as Eva Bellin does, that 'real world events have put religion front and center in current affairs'⁵⁷ or that policymakers have to 'come to terms' with the 'reality' of religion as a security issue.⁵⁸ Whether religion is regarded as a significant factor or not depends to some extent on the different interpretive frames and theoretical presuppositions through which the empirical data is understood. Even when religious beliefs and language are present they may still be coded as epiphenomenal expressions of a more basic set of material interests, in which case it is these material factors that remain front and centre. If religion is understood as a phenomenon with its own reality irreducible to social or economic motivations, one is far more likely to take it seriously as a factor in its own right. Whether or not religion is visible as a significant political factor depends on the theoretical lens through which the world is viewed.

Consider the return of religion to the security agenda. Writing in the mid-1990s, Susanne Hoeber Rudolph argued that the resurgence of religion and its involvement in numerous conflicts around the world had challenged conventional accounts of security.⁵⁹ From the 1950s until the 1980s, the dominant definitions of security privileged the sovereign state as primary agent of security and the referent object to be protected, and threats that were military in character. The problem of nuclear weapons in the context of superpower rivalry absorbed much of the attention of security theorists.⁶⁰ The

⁵⁶ Nancy Fraser, 'From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a "Post-Socialist" Age', *New Left Review* vol., no. 212 (1995); Amy Gutmann, (ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Axel Honneth, *The Struggle For Recognition*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1995). As applied to religious identity, see Cecelia Lynch, 'Dogma, Praxis and Religious Perspectives on Multiculturalism', *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* vol. 29, no. 3 (2000), pp. 743-744.

⁵⁷ Bellin, 'Faith in Politics: New Trends in the Study of Religion and Politics', p. 315.

⁵⁸ Otis, 'Religion and War in the Twenty-first Century'.

⁵⁹ Rudolph, 'Religion, States, and Transnational Civil Society', pp. 4-5.

⁶⁰ For overviews of the preoccupations of security studies at the end of the Cold War, see Joseph S. Nye and Sean M. Lynn-Jones, 'International Security Studies: A Report of a Conference on the State of the Field', *International Security* vol. 12, no. 4 (1988); Stephen M. Walt, 'The Renaissance of Security Studies', *International Studies Quarterly* vol. 35, no. 2 (1991).

involvement of religion in conflict, Rudolph wrote, was part of a broader shift in the balance of violence away from the anarchic space ‘outside’ sovereign states to conflict among domestic ethnic and religious formations. This shift in the locus of security problems forced scholars to reframe their concepts and rethink the meaning of security as a live challenge within civil society itself. The concept of security was redefined, extended to include referent objects and actors other than the state, including religious and ethnic groups. At the same time, the agenda of security analysis was broadened to include a variety of non-traditional issues, from the environment, economic security, health and crime to human rights and drugs.⁶¹

Rudolph’s narrative may have things backwards, though. One should consider the possibility that these developments could only appear as issues of ‘security’, indeed, as being important at all, through changes in the theoretical lenses through which security analysts viewed the world. Ken Booth puts the issue in these terms: ‘what goes under the microscope in the name of security may be the result of changes within the theorist – “in here” – rather than as a result of any significant changes in the world “out there”’.⁶² In the case of domestic conflict, its return to the security agenda after the Cold War can be better explained by a shift in perspective within security thinking, including the rise of ideas about human and individual security,⁶³ than by a supposed absence of civil unrest, proxy conflicts, coups, revolutions and anti-colonial wars of independence during that period. This is not to imply that what happens in the world is entirely irrelevant, or that there has been no change in the economy of violence in the post-Cold War world, but simply that different discourses of security are constitutive of the meanings these events and developments have for the observer.

In other words, as the security agenda expands, an increasing number of phenomena are problematised within a discourse of threat. By extension, we could suggest that the religion-security nexus in international religions might be a consequence of security expanding to meet religion, rather than vice versa. The broadening of the security agenda to encompass referent objects and threats other than states has made it

⁶¹ Ken Booth, 'Security and Emancipation', *Review of International Studies* vol. 17, no. 4 (1991); Booth, *Theory of World Security*; Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, 2nd ed (Harlow: Longman, 1991); Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams, (eds.), *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (London: UCL Press, 1997); Jennifer Tuchman Mathews, 'Redefining Security', *Foreign Affairs* vol. 68, no. 2 (1989); Richard Ullman, 'Redefining Security', *International Security* vol. 8, no. 1 (1983); Wyn Jones, *Security, Strategy, and Critical Theory*. For a useful overview, see Steve Smith, 'The Contested Concept of Security', in Ken Booth (ed.), *Critical Security Studies and World Politics* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2005).

⁶² Ken Booth, 'Security and Self: Confessions of a Fallen Realist', in Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams (eds.), *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (London: UCL Press, 1997), p. 87.

⁶³ UNDP, *Human Development Report 1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

possible for religious actors, relatively few of which operate at the state level, to be understood within the security paradigm. The same could be said about the challenge to the materialist ontology and empiricist epistemology of dominant neorealist approaches to security. The renewed attention to identity, ideas and beliefs as factors shaping security behaviour has made it easier to argue that religious belief is relevant to global security.⁶⁴

A similar point has been made about the concept of religion in international politics. Scott Thomas has argued that international politics scholars have been unable to recognise the importance of religion because their conceptual apparatus was faulty. They were too ready to accept, he argued, the idea that religion is essentially a set of privately held doctrines or beliefs. This concept of religion, he proposes, is simply the religion of liberal modernity that was created as part of the rise of the state. During the early modern period it replaced an understanding of religion as a community of believers, in which virtues and practices were inseparable from beliefs. 'The problem is', Thomas suggests, 'that many, if not most, non-Western societies and communities have still not entirely made, or are struggling not to make, this transition'.⁶⁵ By projecting an inappropriate concept of religion onto non-Western societies, scholars mistakenly assume that religion is irrelevant to public life and are unable to recognise the centrality of religion in non-Western responses to globalisation. If this is the case, then it might be that some differences in how the role of religion is conceived in international politics are premised on different understandings of what is meant by religion.

Thomas's argument here is that by correcting their concepts, IP scholars will be able to account better for the existing data. Yet there is a problem here: if those phenomena Thomas has identified in non-Western societies do not conform to existing definitions of religion, how do we know that they are really religion, and not something else? It is equally plausible to suggest that things only become visible as religion when one expands the concept, and, by extension, a much more restricted range of phenomena are comprehended with narrower definitions. From this perspective, there is no religion until a thing is named as such.

⁶⁴ Michael C. Williams, 'Identity and the Politics of Security', *European Journal of International Relations* vol. 4, no. 2 (1998).

⁶⁵ Scott M. Thomas, 'Taking Religious and Cultural Pluralism Seriously: The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Society', *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* vol. 29, no. 3 (2000), p. 823.

1.3 The Meaning of Religion

A number of scholars in theology, anthropology and religious studies have begun to approach religion in exactly these terms: as a concept constructed in the discourses in which it is named and defined. As Gavin Hyman puts it, 'when the signifier was coined, when religion was "named" as such, it was not simply that an already identifiable phenomenon was simply being "named"; on the contrary, the coining of that signifier itself constituted the creation of the signified as a unified, though diverse phenomenon'.⁶⁶ Religion is the product of a discursive process. It is defined and redefined in specific cultural and historical contexts as it is iterated in novels, sociological treatises, theological tracts and political rhetoric. From this perspective, knowledge about religion is performative, in that it functions to create the objects that it claims to discover and describe.⁶⁷

This has implications for the interminable arguments about religion and violence. Bruce Lincoln has written that 'before we can begin to think about the ways religion, culture, and politics interact, either in general or with direct reference to the September 11 attacks, it is useful to have some clarity about what we take 'religion' to be'.⁶⁸ However, the constructed and historically variable nature of the category means there is no stable signified to be agreed upon. This becomes especially clear if one assumes that the meaning of religion is dependent in some way on the practice of the actual historical religions that are usually taken to comprise the category. Following Alasdair MacIntyre, religions are understood here as discursive traditions.⁶⁹ I will briefly outline what this means in relation to Christianity, but it should be noted that MacIntyre's notion of tradition is a generic concept that applies equally to other kinds of institution or practice that persist through time, including those associated with Islam, or the Conservative Party, for example.

For MacIntyre, a tradition such as Christianity is made up of discourses that instruct practitioners as the correct form and purposes of the practices that make up the tradition. The beliefs and concepts that inform particular institutions and practices may

⁶⁶ Hyman, 'The Study of Religion and the Return of Theology', p. 211.

⁶⁷ Taylor, 'Introduction', pp. 6-7.

⁶⁸ Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11*, 2nd ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 1.

⁶⁹ The discussion here draws largely on Alasdair MacIntyre, 'The Essential Contestability of Some Social Concepts', *Ethics* vol. 84, no. 1 (1973). but also on the applications of MacIntyre's work in Talal Asad, 'The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam', in John A. Hall and Ian Jarvie (eds.), *The Social Philosophy of Ernest Gellner* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996). and to a lesser extent Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations*.

form a relatively stable and homogenous set, or they may be diverse and conflicting. The history of Christianity, for example, is a history of debate and conflict over the character of Christianity, and the nature and purpose of the practices and institutions through which it is embodied. In this way, it can be contrasted with a social institution such as the monetary system, whose central beliefs and institutions are agreed upon and relatively stable through time. Debate over the character of Christian practice necessarily has an effect on the character of Christian institutions. Disagreements are expressed as much in behaviour as in words, and the inseparability of theory and practice means that these embodied practices are not secondary to beliefs. Beliefs and practices may change over time, but the continuity of a social institution such as Christianity exists as much in the continuity of institutionalised argument and debate over the identity of the tradition as it does in regularities of belief and practice.

If other religions are traditions, in MacIntyre's sense, then it is likely to be exceedingly difficult to isolate stable commonalities among the shifting beliefs and practices that can anchor meaningful generalisations about the role of religion in international politics. Chapter 3 will take up this argument at greater length, arguing that there are in fact no such commonalities that can warrant generalising about 'religion', where this is taken to mean a category comprised of the five or six 'world religions'. There is a further important point to note here though. The concept of religion stands in a peculiar relationship with the institutions and practices of religious traditions. To the extent that Christians understand Christianity as a religion (and this has not always been the case), debate over the meaning of religion will tend to shape conceptions of appropriate Christian practice. For example, when religion is accepted to be fundamentally a matter of private belief, Christian practice as religion will tend to towards a greater individualism. However, even if some Christians reject the characterisation of their practices as 'religion', a more generally-shared conception of Christianity as a religion within wider society will exert a strong normalising influence on the kind of behaviour understood to be appropriate for Christians. In the context of modern societies where the concept of religion is generally assumed, struggle over appropriate forms, practices and expressions of specific traditions are struggles over the meaning of religion, and conversely debate over the meaning of religion feeds into the discursive frames through which certain forms of religion are normalised and others subtly disciplined.

In other words, the politics *about* religion goes right down into the very constitution of the concept within discourse – all those ways of speaking and writing about religion, and acting on it, that assume it to be a certain sort of thing. Accepting this perspective means putting the meaning of the term at the heart of the politics of religion, for the problem of meaning is not divorced from the social order one seeks to describe.⁷⁰ Rather than treating the meaning of ‘religion’ as a problem that arises in relation to the language of analysis, a problem to be resolved before the analysis can begin, one can view this problem as itself being at the heart of political struggles. The resurgence of religion in a political mode, and the various responses to it, can then be understood as a struggle over meanings rather than simply a struggle over ends.

This struggle has already been noted in relation to the associative meanings carried by the concept. However, it is not only the broader connotations carried by the concept that is disputed, or the boundaries between religion and politics, but the very thing that makes religion *religious*. There are numerous instances where the meaning of religion – what should be included in the term, what the term connotes – makes a material difference. Most generally, the political or legal recognition of a group as ‘religious’ can determine whether a set of practices and beliefs are deserving of protection on grounds of religious freedom.⁷¹ It can also have implications on more substantive issues such as conscientious objection,⁷² cemetery regulations,⁷³ acceptable modes of dress,⁷⁴ taxation, charitable status and blasphemy law,⁷⁵ religious education⁷⁶ and advertising.⁷⁷

In the light of considerations such as these, a number of scholars have sought to subject the category and its use to critical analysis rather than throwing their weight behind the search for more adequate definitions. As Russell McCutcheon puts it, ‘making “religion” our object of study involves examining this malleable, Latin-based taxon as a

⁷⁰ Michael J. Shapiro, *Reading the Postmodern Polity: Political Theory as Textual Practice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. 26.

⁷¹ Bryan Wilson, *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 69-86.

⁷² Victoria S. Harrison, 'The Pragmatics of Defining Religion in a Multi-Cultural World', *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* vol. 59 (2006), p. 145; Massimo Introvigne, 'Religion as Claim: Social and Legal Controversies', in Jan G. Platvoet and Arie L. Moledijk (eds.), *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 44-45.

⁷³ Michael Warner, 'Is Liberalism a Religion?' in Hent de Vries (ed.), *Religion: Beyond a Concept* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 615.

⁷⁴ Saba Mahmood, 'Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation', *Public Culture* vol. 18, no. 2 (2006), p. 325.

⁷⁵ James A. Beckford, 'The Politics of Defining Religion in a Secular Society: From a Taken-for-Granted Institution to a Contested Resource', in Jan G. Platvoet and Arie L. Moledijk (eds.), *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 26-30.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-34.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-37.

tool specific to certain sets of human beings who currently use it to name, demarcate, and rank specific zones of human practice'.⁷⁸ Socio-political implications follow from the use of different notions of 'religion', as David Chidester has demonstrated in his exploration of the intimate connection between ideas about religion and the justification and administration of imperial projects of conquest and control.⁷⁹ Indeed, the political dimension of religion is inescapable. Chidester writes that 'theorizing about religion has itself been a kind of political practice'.⁸⁰ Graham Ward notes that 'the employment of the term is fraught with certain cultural politics' and that 'anyone with any insight into the history of the term...recognizes that never is religion or the labelling of what is religious non-ideological'.⁸¹ In addition to participating in the justification and naturalisation of certain political orders and practices, particular definitions of religion and specific ascriptions of identity to the phenomenon serve to discipline the forms religion can legitimately take, invariably according to a culturally specific understanding. There is no neutral description of religion then, but these conceptions do not come entirely pre-formed, ready for strategic deployment. They are themselves produced and reproduced as they are articulated within a variety of discourses. Religion is created as part of the theological, social and political projects in which the concept is iterated.

1.4 Security and the Modern Discourse of Religion

A number of studies have traced the connections between political projects and the deployment of particular concepts of religion. Alongside Chidester's already-mentioned study of colonialism, there have been a number of offerings exploring the connections between imperial projects and religion as a mode of classification. Derek Peterson has explored the role of the concept in missionary activities in colonial Kenya.⁸² Timothy Fitzgerald and Russell McCutcheon have touched upon similar issues through their critiques of the discipline of religious studies.⁸³ Others have explored the role of theological disputes in the constitution of religion, and the effect of the state-building

⁷⁸ McCutcheon, 'Religion, Ire, and Dangerous Things', p. 175.

⁷⁹ Chidester, 'Anchoring Religion in the World: A Southern African History of Comparative Religion'.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 156.

⁸¹ Ward, 'The Future of Religion', p. 180.

⁸² Peterson, 'Gambling with God: Rethinking Religion in Colonial Central Kenya'.

⁸³ Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 29-32; McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*, pp. 158-191.

project in early modern Europe.⁸⁴ Graham Ward's broad-ranging study examines a series of moments in the evolution of the concept from the early modern to the present day, making connections between the literary sources he examines and their broader socio-political contexts.⁸⁵

The literature on religion in international politics has largely neglected the politics of what religion means and the processes through which it is constructed discursively. The question of meaning is invariably treated as a problem of definition rather than a political question in itself.⁸⁶ This study examines the connection between the concept of religion and projects undertaken in the name of a central theme in international politics: that of security. Security represents a promising site for examining discourses of religion, for three reasons. First of all, as has been noted above, the connection between religion and security has been a prominent theme in explorations of the implications of religious resurgence. Secondly, security is a central category of liberal politics. Mark Neocleous has pointed out that 'our whole political language and culture has become saturated by "security"'. Nearly all political disputes and disagreements now appear to centre on the conception of security'.⁸⁷ The centrality of security is no surprise, he contends, because it has historically been a pre-eminent concept in liberal political thought.⁸⁸

For Hobbes, for example, the purpose of the state was the security of life and material goods: 'The finall Cause, End, or Designe of men, (who naturally love Liberty, and Dominion over others,) in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves, (in which we see them live in Commonwealths,) is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented live thereby'.⁸⁹ Locke had a similar conception of the purpose of political power which erected and enforced a system of laws in order 'that Provision might be made for the security of each Mans private Possessions; for the Peace, Riches, and publick Commodities of the whole People; and, as much as possible, for the Increase of their inward Strength, against Forreign Invasions'.⁹⁰ Elsewhere he wrote that 'The great *chief end*...of Mens uniting into Commonwealths, and putting themselves under

⁸⁴ Cavanaugh, "'A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House': The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State"; Peter Harrison, *"Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁸⁵ Ward, *True Religion*.

⁸⁶ An exception is Don Baker's study of the adoption of the category of religion by East Asian states. Don Baker, 'World Religions and National States: Competing Claims in East Asia', in Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and James Piscatori (eds.), *Transnational Religion and Fading States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).

⁸⁷ Mark Neocleous, *Critique of Security* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 2.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 11-38.

⁸⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Dent, 1965), pp. 87, 178.

⁹⁰ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), p. 48.

Government, *is the Preservation of Property*’,⁹¹ property being defined broadly by Locke as the life, freedom and material goods of the individual.⁹²

Later liberal thinkers were no less concerned with security. Adam Smith described the first duty of sovereignty ‘that of protecting the society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies’ and the second duty as ‘that of protecting, as far as possible, every member of society from the injustice or oppression of every other member of it’.⁹³ Civil government, he proposed, was instituted ‘for the security of property’.⁹⁴ Jeremy Bentham insisted that ‘The care of providing for his enjoyments ought to be left almost entirely to each individual; the principle function of government being to protect him from sufferings’, and described security as the foremost priority of the legislator before subsistence, abundance and equality.⁹⁵ John Stuart Mill described security as ‘the most vital of all interests’ and commented that ‘security of person and property, and equal justice between individuals, are the first needs of society, and the primary ends of government’.⁹⁶

Among the repertoire of liberal political concepts, security is one of the most useful because it is powerful. As a number of scholars have argued, framing an issue in terms of security constructs it as an especially urgent matter.⁹⁷ It has a similar utility in the academic world, where a subject is more likely to be taken seriously if it has security implications. To take an anecdotal example, the British International Studies Association’s recently formed working group on Religion, Security and IR debated in meeting in 2007 whether the group’s name was appropriate. Concern was voiced that including ‘security’ in the title perpetuated pejorative associations of religion with violence, and misleadingly implied that religion was relevant in IP only in terms of security. The consensus in favour of keeping ‘security’ was founded on the observation that emphasising the security-relevance of the working group would make it easier to procure research funding.

The modern discourse of religion, in IP

⁹¹ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 350-351.

⁹² Ibid., pp. 323, 350. Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, p. 47. On Locke see further Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, p. 268.

⁹³ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations: Books IV-V* (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 279, 297.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 302.

⁹⁵ Jeremy Bentham, ‘Principles of the Civil Code’, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1838), pp. 301-302.

⁹⁶ Both quotations from Neocleous, *Critique of Security*, p. 27.

⁹⁷ Booth, ‘Security and Emancipation’; Neocleous, *Critique of Security*, p. 2; Wæver, ‘Securitisation and Desecuritisation’.

The suggestion that security politics may be an important site for the production and reproduction of discourses of religion implies that discussions about religion and security in the discipline of IP may be especially implicated in the politics *about* religion. The assumptions about religion made in this literature are therefore a good place to start in order to begin to understand how it is being produced in contemporary security politics. This section will identify two assumptions in particular that are often made, but first it is useful to note that the importance of the concept varies from study to study.

Timothy Fitzgerald usefully identifies a spectrum of usages for the words 'religion' and 'religions' in the humanities and social sciences. At one end of this spectrum are those who use religion in a strong sense – religion is here the central focus of attention, employed consciously and deliberately as a basic and distinctive dimension of human existence. At the other end of the spectrum is work in which religion is used in a weaker, casual or marginal fashion. Religion is vaguely used to refer to rituals, beliefs or practices related to gods, although this usage is more of a habitual reflex than a deliberate and sustained policy. These analyses are less dependent on the cogency of religion as a concept. In the middle of the spectrum, one finds religion used deliberately and frequently, a usage which carries the underlying assumption that it is a useful and productive analytical category. These scholars believe that there is a legitimate analytical distinction to be made between religious and non-religious institutions and beliefs in a given society, although religion may be defined in various ways.⁹⁸

This spectrum of strong and weak usage can be profitably employed to understand the range of ways in which religion is used by those working on religion in international politics. At the 'weak' end of the scale could be placed those works in which the concept does not play a central role, but is used in the course of empirical explorations of the politics associated with specific traditions in particular locations.⁹⁹ At the 'strong' end would be work that seeks to theorise the identity of religion, and the difference it makes politically. Here, the behaviour of religious actors and the role of religion in politics is explained in terms of some feature, characteristic or function internal to religion itself. Religion, conceived in abstract, generalised terms, plays a strong

⁹⁸ Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, pp. 10-13.

⁹⁹ For example, see Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: On the Trail of Political Islam*, 4th ed (London: I.B. Taurus, 2006); Lee Marsden, *For God's Sake: The Christian Right and US Foreign Policy* (London: Zed Books, 2008); Michael Northcott, *An Angel Directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2004).

role in explanation.¹⁰⁰ In the middle could be placed the work of authors who may not necessarily claim that the behaviour of certain political actors is governed by some specific religious logic, but who nonetheless assume that there is something to be gained from distinguishing between religious and non-religious actors and institutions. They may or may not attempt to define religion explicitly, but by subsuming particular traditions within the overarching category of religion, imply that these traditions have something 'religious' in common that sets them apart. In other words, these authors treat such diverse phenomena as the Christian Right in the US, the Hindutva movement in India, and the Taliban in Afghanistan as being specific examples of the more general phenomenon of religion in politics.¹⁰¹

As one moves towards the stronger end of the scale, two key assumptions often become evident. An important argument of this thesis is that these two assumptions lie at the centre of the contemporary politics *about* religion. The next two chapters will examine them in more detail – discussions that will be a ground-clearing operation prior to part II of the thesis, in which it is argued that they represent the conceptual counterparts of two different strategies of security. Chapters 2 and 3 seek to denaturalise these assumptions and highlight their particularity and the contestations that surround them, as they are widely presupposed in the international politics literature. However, there are certain problems with these assumptions that raise serious questions for attempts to theorise the impact of religion in conflict situations, or in international politics in general.

These assumptions are two dimensions of what is being called here the modern discourse of religion. They are that (1) religion is one area of human culture among others, and (2) that religion is a genus, of which the religions are species. The idea that religion represents an area of human practice that is distinguished from other human activities by some specific difference has been assumed by many of those who write

¹⁰⁰ Examples of this approach would include Kratochwil, 'Religion and (Inter-)National Politics: On the Heuristics of Identities, Structures, and Agents'; Laustsen and Wæver, 'In Defence of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization'.

¹⁰¹ Jonathan Fox, 'Clash of Civilisations or Clash of Religions: Which is a More Important Determinant of Ethnic Conflict?' *Ethnicities* vol. 1, no. 3 (2001); Fox, 'Are Religious Minorities more Militant than Other Ethnic Minorities?'; Fox, 'The Rise of Religious Nationalism and Conflict: Ethnic Conflict and Revolutionary Wars, 1945-2001'; Fox and Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Relations*; Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler, 'The Question of Religion and World Politics', *Terrorism and Political Violence* vol. 17, no. 3 (2005); Andreas Hasenclever and Volker Rittberger, 'Does Religion Make a Difference? Theoretical Approaches to the Impact of Faith on Political Conflict', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* vol. 29, no. 3 (2000); Jeff Haynes, 'Religion, Secularisation and Politics: a Postmodern Conspectus', *Third World Quarterly* vol. 18, no. 4 (1997); Haynes, *Introduction to International Relations and Religion*; Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations*.

about religion and world politics. That difference might be a distinctive logic or rationale to religious action, or perhaps it is taken to involve the pursuit of a different set of objectives by different means. Sometimes this is argued for explicitly. For example, Vendulka Kulbáková has written of an ontological difference between religious and secular thought: 'This difference in ontology leads to epistemological and methodological differences between religious and secular ways of looking at the world'.¹⁰² Laustsen and Wæver comment that treating religion as a form of identity-based community 'does not do justice to the distinctly religious', and 'only covers religion *as community* and not religion *as religion*'.¹⁰³ Scott Thomas proposes that 'the kinds of beliefs and practices we have come to call religion are not like other kinds of ideas, beliefs or practices in international relations, nor is it adequate to describe religion as a belief system or ideology'.¹⁰⁴ Thomas Farr has written that 'Policymakers should approach religion much as they do economics and politics – that is, as something that drives the behaviour of people and governments in important ways. Like political and economic motives, religious motives can act as a multiplier of both destructive and constructive behaviors, often with more intense results'.¹⁰⁵ Farr's implicit assumption is that religious actions are more intense and differently directed in comparison with actions driven by political or economic motives. While others do not explicitly make any *a priori* assumptions about the irreducibility of religion to secular categories, their focus on the impact of religious actors, values and ideas makes the implicit assumption that there is something distinctive about the religious as opposed to other aspects of human culture, and that we can make a meaningful distinction between religious ideas and secular ideas.¹⁰⁶

The second assumption – that the religions are species of a common genus – often assumes a model of essence and manifestation.. Laustsen and Wæver put it strongly when they insist that 'one has to accept that our way to the universal (religion as such) goes through the particular (Christianity)'.¹⁰⁷ This comment is exceptional only for its explicit and clear statement of what is more often implicitly assumed rather than openly argued for. It can be seen in the numerous studies that explore the role of religion in

¹⁰² Vendulka Kulbáková, 'Towards an International Political Theology', *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* vol. 29, no. 3 (2000), p. 683.

¹⁰³ Laustsen and Wæver, 'In Defence of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization', p. 709. Italics in original.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations*, p. 93.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas F. Farr, 'Diplomacy in an Age of Faith: Religious Freedom and National Security', *Foreign Affairs* vol. 87, no. 2 (2008), p. 119.

¹⁰⁶ For example, see Haynes, *Introduction to International Relations and Religion*; Johnston and Sampson, (eds.), *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*.

¹⁰⁷ Laustsen and Wæver, 'In Defence of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization', p. 710.

world politics, taking the category of religion to mean ‘the world religions’, if nothing else. It can also be found in empirical studies of particular traditions, studies that are conceived as contributing to the broader enterprise of understanding the political impact of religion. The assumption here is that there is sufficient similarity in what are identified as instances of the class to warrant making generalisations about them. Such efforts will be discussed in chapter 3, where it is argued that this assumption is misplaced.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the notion of religion as a discursive construction and object of political contestation. It located this thesis in relation to the work that has sought to bring religion into the study of international politics, arguing that while there has been some reflection on the meaning of religion as a problem of definition, it has received little attention as a political problem in its own right. The chapter located this work by international politics scholars within a wider societal politics *about* religion and its role in society, and argued that these debates go all the way down to the meaning of the concept itself. It identified two dimensions of a ‘modern discourse of religion’. Chapters 2 and 3 will argue that these assumptions lie, in different ways, at the heart of the contemporary politics *about* religion. Part II will argue that they were products of early modern efforts to pacify European societies in the wake of the Wars of Religion, and persist in Tony Blair’s more recent discussions of religion and violence. In the meantime, the next chapter will take up the idea that religion is a subsection of culture, arguing that it should be understood as the product of a secularisation process in which a separate domain of religion was invented rather than discovered.

2 SECULARISATION AS THE PRODUCTION OF AUTONOMOUS 'RELIGION'

Having introduced in the previous chapter the idea that 'religion' can be conceived as a discursive construction as well as an object of political contestation, this chapter will further explore the first of these arguments by examining the assumption that religion is one aspect of human culture among others, with its own identity and logic. This way of categorising social reality not only implies that we can make a meaningful distinction between religious and non-religious beliefs, practices, norms and values, but is itself an outcome of the historical process of secularisation in Western modernity. To treat religion as a thing in itself, not reducible to and naturally distinct from politics, economics, society, culture and so forth, is to reify the pluralisation of discourses and practices that has been a key feature of liberal modernity, and the differentiation of religion as a discrete societal sphere that is a product of secularisation. To make the *a priori* assumption that this is a universal state of affairs is to uncritically project the assumptions and conditions of European secular modernity onto the rest of the world in a profoundly eurocentric fashion. Representing religion as a subsection of culture is a political intervention in that it sets up a normative standard that is then used to judge other cultures that have been 'unable' to distinguish between religion and politics. It also sustains unhelpful debates about whether the aims of movements such as Al-Qaeda are religious or political.

The burden of the rest of this chapter and the next will be to demonstrate that the two aspects of the modern discourse of religion I have identified, far from being aspects of an essential trans-cultural and trans-historical category, are features derived from its contingent modern invention. In the next chapter, I will address the issues raised by the invention of 'religion' as a genus of which 'the religions' are species. I show how the very urge to define religion as a thing with an essence is modern and Western; I proceed to examine specific attempts to ascribe an essence to religion in general, suggesting that these efforts reveal the eurocentricity and incoherence of all attempts to distinguish religion from the secular. In this chapter, however, I propose to begin with the other dimension of the modern discourse of religion: the assumption that religion is one aspect of human culture among others, asking how it is that religion can be treated

as one dimension of human life. I propose that to do so reiterates the contingent outcome of a process of secularisation.

The argument proceeds from here in four stages. In the next section, I describe briefly the situation of religion in contemporary Western societies, suggesting that the modern discourse of religion derives a measure of plausibility from articulating ingrained assumptions about religion in modernity. The second section proposes that the imagination of religion in the modern West can by no means be regarded as universal, as there exist cultures in which no theoretical or practical separation of 'religion' as one dimension of life among many is made. In these contexts, the concept picks out nothing that is meaningfully distinct. The third section suggests that in such contexts, religion can only be retained as a descriptive or political concept on the basis of the metaphysical assumption that it has an essence. The final section proposes an alternative approach that treats both religion and the various secular spheres as discursive productions, human cultural creations that are shaped by politics and have political implications. In conclusion, I draw out some implications of this discussion for the effort to bring religion into IP.

2.1 'Religion' in Modernity

The claim that religion is a discrete aspect of culture, basically a different thing to politics and economics, expresses a belief that is widely shared in the Western world and beyond. The concept of religion is well established in the modern West, and finds correlates in the languages of other cultures, suggesting that a meaningful distinction can be drawn between religion and non-religion. Sometimes religion is distinguished from culture itself. A common question raised in recent debates over the wearing of the veil by Muslim women in Britain has been whether this practice is religious, and therefore 'truly Islamic', or whether it is 'merely' cultural. Oliver O'Donovan points out that this consensus does not necessarily assume that there is no overlap or interaction between religion and other spheres; politics, for example, may enrich religion which adopts its characteristic imagery and metaphors. And religion, in turn, 'may and does shape politics through carefully guarded channels of influence that preserve a cordon sanitaire. Ethics, especially an ethics of interior motivation, provides a safe mediation, insulated against theocratic understanding, by which religion may make politics more honest without presuming to

make it more divine'.¹ While a certain intercourse is accepted, the basic assumption persists that politics and religion are essentially separate discourses.

The separation between religion and other aspects of culture is not only spoken of, but lived out in practice to varying degrees. The distinction between religion and non-religion has received concrete social expression through its institutionalisation in many contexts. Religions themselves frequently operate through specific organisations and self-identified religio-social movements, and the notion of religion as a thing apart has been incorporated into the legal and bureaucratic structures of modern states.² Again, the differentiation and formation of religion is neither total nor unambiguous. Not that everything that could conceivably be thought of as religion is treated and claimed as such, and neither are acknowledged religions fully differentiated from other dimensions of life, as demonstrated in different ways by the political systems of Britain and the United States. However, it seems reasonable to say that there is, in many countries, some degree of practical separation between religious institutions and activities and those associated with domains of art, sport, health, science, politics and economics.

Max Weber was one of the first to theorise this situation as characteristic of modernity.³ Society is divided into a variety of separate life-spheres, such as the state, economy, art, science and religion. Each have what he described as their 'internal and lawful autonomy',⁴ contain their own principles and norms and serve specific functions.⁵ Alongside social differentiation, religion in modernity is essentially private in character. Religious beliefs are increasingly subjective, part of a personal quest for meaning. Because each aspect of life is governed by its own norms, these norms cannot be subsumed within or integrated by means of a religious worldview. As a consequence, individual consciousness is segmented and institutionalised religion is de-politicised, with no role in the operation of secular spheres. Religion is just one domain among many in

¹ Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 2-3.

² Peter Beyer, 'The Religious System of Global Society: a Sociological Look at Contemporary Religion and Religions', *Numen* vol. 45, no. 1 (1998); Peter Beyer, 'Conceptions of Religion: On Distinguishing Scientific, Theological, and "Official" Meanings', *Social Compass* vol. 50, no. 2 (2003).

³ Max Weber, 'Politics as a Vocation', in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1991); Max Weber, 'Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions', in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1991); Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1991).

⁴ Weber, 'Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions', p. 328.

⁵ Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, pp. 20-25.

society, and as a consequence of this society itself cannot be integrated by institutionalised religion.⁶

A further significant point to note is that the differentiation of society is not only an empirical feature of modernity, but a normative project of liberalism. Michael Walzer has argued that when confronted with the largely undifferentiated world inherited from the Middle Ages, liberal theorists ‘preached and practiced an art of separation. They drew lines, marked off different realms, and created the sociopolitical map with which we are still familiar’.⁷ He described this project as being concerned with freedom: ‘Liberalism is a world of walls, and each one creates a new liberty’.⁸ The wall between church and state creates a realm of religion free from the intrusion of politicians and bureaucrats. Fencing universities off from both church and state (or state churches) creates a space of academic freedom for students and professors. The autonomy of civil society creates a space for free economic exchange unrestricted by sumptuary laws, notions of just price or state-enforced programmes of redistribution. The separation of family and state abolishes privileges of birth and creates opportunities for free, meritocratic competition for power and advancement. Finally, drawing a boundary between the public and private spheres creates a space for the enjoyment of individual and familial life.⁹ The compartmentalisation of society is a facet of the liberal belief that there is no overarching good that unites society, but only a plurality of goods, each appropriate to different spheres, pursued by individuals through a variety of different forms of human association. Indeed, individuals who subordinate their goals to an end proper to one sphere in particular – such as the religious – exhibit a disfigured form of selfhood.¹⁰

From the perspective of liberalism, the modern differentiation of spheres is celebrated as separating things that are naturally or ideally distinct. The assumption that religious, political and economic objectives are different in some fundamental sense, such that one could argue over whether a particular group is motivated by religion, by desire for power within the state, or by economic interests, thus echoes this liberal categorisation of the world. The discussion of liberalism also indicated that assuming religion and politics to be naturally distinct does not only authorise certain modes of analysis, but sustains representations of this as a normative state of affairs. Those who

⁶ Ibid., pp. 35-39.

⁷ Michael Walzer, ‘Liberalism and the Art of Separation’, *Political Theory* vol. 12, no. 3 (1984), p. 315.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 315-317.

¹⁰ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 337. An exceptionally clear advocacy of this perspective, articulated in relation to individual identity can be found in Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence* (London: Penguin, 2006).

claim not to recognise liberal distinctions between the spheres are suffering from an incapacity in some way. Consider this statement from Ben-Dor and Pedahzur in a commentary on 'Islamic fundamentalism'. They write that 'The immediacy of faith in the lives of believers makes it difficult for them to separate religion from politics', as if fundamentalist believers are unable to properly distinguish what should rightfully be separated because they cannot maintain a sufficient distance from their faith.¹¹

It may be that this is nevertheless a correct mode of analysis – liberalism has perhaps discerned the truth of things in the circumstances of modernity. The remainder of this chapter will argue, however, that there is no necessary reason to suppose that societal differentiation brought to light an objective separation of spheres. This opens up the possibility of understanding differentiation as created and sustained by liberalism itself, and secularisation as a contested discursive process. The next section suggests that before and beyond the modern West, there has been no identification of a sphere of religion essentially separate to other areas of life – even in the medieval West where the separation of temporal and spiritual power is often misinterpreted as evidence of a religion-secular distinction.

If they had been asked to draw up an inventory of the problems they faced in the course of organising their common life, those who inhabited Western Christendom would not have included the supposedly age-old problem of 'religion and politics'. Such a problem was inconceivable, not because religion and politics worked together, or because the institutional dominance of the Church suppressed all dissent, but because during the early and high Middle Ages they were not imagined as distinct realities. More specifically, as there was no realm of life external to 'religion' there was nothing to be 'influenced' or 'dominated' by religion. To the extent that there was no 'secular' in the modern sense of spheres of life external to 'religion', there was also no religion – at least, there was no 'religion' in the sense of a differentiated sphere or an element of cultural activity uniquely concerned with (for example) man's orientation towards a sacred or transcendent realm.

This chapter proposes that the assumption that religion is a trans-cultural and trans-historical category is not convincingly borne out by empirical and historical evidence. There have been, and are, cultures in which no meaningful distinction is made between religious and secular spheres – not only in theory, but also in practice. The first aspect of the modern discourse of religion therefore seems to be uniquely modern, in historical terms, and Western in origin. Religion has not always been imagined or lived

¹¹ Gabriel Ben-Dor and Ami Pedahzur, 'The Uniqueness of Islamic Fundamentalism and the Fourth Wave of International Secularism', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* vol. 4, no. 3 (2003), p. 71.

out as a thing apart, distinct from political, economic, or social activities. Not only is it a comparative novelty in the West (if we take the long view), but there are contexts where the concept is not native and has yet to fully penetrate. The assumption that religion refers to an autonomous domain of human culture is therefore problematic when it is assumed to exist both historically and cross-culturally, before or beyond the influence of Western modernity. It takes the circumstances of Western modernity to be universally valid, obscuring from view different cultural speculations on 'what there is' and alternative modes of political and social organisation. We cannot suppose from the outset that religion has always been one among a number of different 'factors' or 'variables' in politics, or that 'religion and politics' is an eternal human problem.

One significant albeit seemingly paradoxical implication of this is that the line of thinking which goes 'religion may be less marginal in political life in the modern West, but in other parts of the world it is just as significant as it ever was' misses the point. It is not the case that religion is more significant outside of modernity. Rather, the converse is true: it is *only* in the context of modernity that religion is significant. Before and beyond modernity, 'religion' was and is never a factor, and it is only on the basis of a suspect universalisation of a particular aspect of the modern discourse of religion that such a thing can be proposed. Viewing the world through modern lenses may lead us to believe that religion is everywhere increasingly irrelevant, but it is equally the case that modern lenses make us draw the apparently opposite conclusion that religion is everywhere important. To insist that religion must be taken seriously as religion, is to advocate a degree of westernisation and modernisation.

To retroactively apply the modern meanings of 'religious' and 'secular' to aspects of medieval life and medieval institutions, or assume that elements of non-Western cultures can necessarily be categorised in terms of religion and non-religion, is a move that departs from the meanings through which these peoples constructed their social and political universes. It supposes religion to be a category that is assumed, at least implicitly, in the conceptual landscape of every culture. This is not only ahistorical, but eurocentric in the sense that it unreflectively universalises one aspect of the cultural order of Western modernity as a structural condition of human society as such. And yet does this matter, one might ask? What significance should be accorded to the absence of a recognisable concept of religion before and beyond Western modernity? Is it important that people do not understand certain of their activities as 'religious' and others as 'secular'? As Peter Beyer points out, from the fact that religion is a relatively recent construction and

inauthentic in non-Western contexts, it does not *inevitably* follow that it is not a valid universal category of human endeavour or experience.¹²

There are at least two possible responses to this. The first is to insist that there is an objective distinction between religious and political activities even if the difference goes unrecognised in a particular epoch. This is the line taken by certain varieties of secularisation theory, in which it is assumed that the essence of religion is trans-historically and trans-culturally present, even when the autonomy of this essence is only dimly realised in the conceptual and institutional structures of a given society. A second response, appropriate when one understands social categories to be constructed discursively, is to suggest that the discourses in which the boundaries between politics and religion are identified are constitutive of those spheres. This chapter argues for this second option, proposing that secularisation should be understood as the discursive constitution of autonomous life spheres, rather than a process in which they each realise their own objectively distinct natures. From this perspective, the assumption that religion is objectively separate to other realms of human practice becomes a highly questionable ideological defence of liberal modernity. If secularisation was not simply the separating out of essentially different social elements that had been 'merged' or 'confused' in earlier times though, it then becomes logical to ask why and how this constitution of separated spheres occurred. In chapter 4 I argue that the security strategy of an emergent liberalism played a key role, and in chapter 6 I take Tony Blair's discussion of Islam as an illustration of the tensions and contradictions involved in the ongoing constitution of differentiated religion in security discourse. Before moving on, however, it is important to underscore the contingency of the modern, Western notion of differentiated religion.

The remainder of this chapter explores a disjuncture between ingrained assumptions about religion in Western modernity, and the apparent absence of any conceptual and practical separation between religious and non-religious spheres of life before and beyond the influence of the modern West. Questioning how the transition to the modern mode of classification might be understood, it makes the case for understanding secularisation as a process of discursive negotiation and political struggle in which the very existence of 'religion' is disputed. The chapter pays particular attention to medieval Christianity, for two reasons. The first arises out of the observation that the differentiation of politics and religion is commonly read back into Christianity as being present since its inception. This has recently provided the basis for a critique of Islam by

¹² Beyer, 'Conceptions of Religion', p. 149.

scholars such as Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis. They have argued that the separation of politics and religion is an achievement of 'Judeo-Christian' culture and the foundation of freedom, whereas Islam tends towards violence because it has been unable or unwilling to emulate such a separation.¹³ An argument of this chapter is that the division of religion and politics is a relatively recent and contested development even within Christianity, and it is a serious misinterpretation to project it back to the origins of the faith. The second reason is that making this argument sets the scene for chapter 4, in which it is proposed that attempts to pacify early modern societies were instrumental in the constitution of a novel sphere of religion that had not been present in medieval Christendom.

2.2 Religion: Neither Trans-Cultural nor Trans-Historical

The assumption that something called religion can be identified throughout history, and in other cultures, as something distinct from other aspects of life, has an aura of common sense. Take, for example, this statement from Fox and Sandler:

It is important to point out that the transnational religious challenge to the state is not unique to the modern era. Rather, the tension between religion and state is an ancient one. We discover it already in the book of Samuel when the Israelites request a king to lead them in wars namely international politics, and the prophet is not totally satisfied with this request...the inherent tension between transnational religion and the state has existed for millennia.¹⁴

Fox and Sandler suggest here that a distinction between religion and non-religion can already be found in ancient Israel. The state is represented as something that exists external to, and therefore can be in tension with, religion. There is a problem here though. Fox and Sandler's attempt to invoke the politics of ancient Israel as evidence of an eternal clash between transnational religion and the state must deal with the objection that ancient Hebrew had no concept of religion (quite apart from there being no concept of 'the state' at this time).¹⁵ Neither is ancient Hebrew peculiar in this respect; Wilfred

¹³ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, pp. 70, 264; Lewis, 'The Roots of Muslim Rage'.

¹⁴ Fox and Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Relations*, p. 84.

¹⁵ Wilfred Cantwell Smith notes that classical Hebrew had no word signifying 'religion', and the concept is not found in the Old Testament. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 59. Quentin Skinner has demonstrated that the history of the state cannot be

Cantwell Smith's research led him to conclude that no equivalent to the modern concept of religion as a unique dimension of life could be found among what he called the 'noncivilisational peoples of the world', nor among the Romans, the ancient Egyptians, the Persians, the Aztecs, nor the ancient Indians, Chinese or Japanese. Likewise, the Greeks spoke about the Gods, but not about religion.¹⁶ Richard Cohen has come to similar conclusions with regard to Buddhism in India.¹⁷ Peter Beyer argues that the concept was unknown in Japan until the late 19th century, and was taken up in China only at the turn of the 20th century.¹⁸ Where the concept exists today in non-Western contexts, it can invariably be demonstrated to be a recent importation rather than a native category.

In the West, the apparent naturalness of religion as a category is lent weight though by the comparatively long pedigree of the word in European languages, and its derivation from a superficially similar Latin precursor. And yet etymological investigation into medieval and classical usage of the Latin term *religio* reveals – especially in the later Roman period – a multiplicity of meanings both diachronically and synchronically, none of which correspond to the modern understanding of religion as a thing with an essence. The original derivation of *religio* is lost in the fog of antiquity, and was obscure to even classical and early Christian writers. Cicero proposed *legere*, meaning 'to gather together' or 'to arrange' as the root form; Lucretius and the Patristic figures Lactantius and Tertullian entertained the supposition that it was a variation of *ligare*, 'to tie together' or 'to bind'. Others have since suggested the meaning is connected to words that meant 'care for' or 'have regard for'.¹⁹

The usage of the term *religio* itself was equally diverse. Some have noted its usage in the sense of 'a doubt or a scruple of any kind'; others claim it meant 'to take up again for a new choice, to reconsider a previous step', in the sense of beginning again, revising the decision that resulted from a prior choice.²⁰ In his classic work *The Meaning and End of*

traced back beyond the fourteenth century, and did not acquire anything like its modern meaning of an abstract, depersonalised locus of political authority until the late sixteenth century. Quentin Skinner, 'The State', in Terence Ball, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson (eds.), *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹⁶ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, pp. 51-59. A finding supported by Ernst Feil: Ernst Feil, 'From the Classical *Religio* to the Modern *Religion*: Elements of a Transformation Between 1550 and 1650', in Michel Despland and Gerard Vallee (eds.), *Religion in History: The Word, the Idea, the Reality* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1992), p. 33.

¹⁷ Richard S. Cohen, 'Why Study Indian Buddhism?' in Derek R. Peterson and Darren R. Walhof (eds.), *The Invention of Religion* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

¹⁸ Peter Beyer, 'Defining Religion in Cross-National Perspective: Identity and Difference in Official Conceptions', in Arthur L. Greil and David G. Bromley (eds.), *Defining Religion: Investigating the Boundaries Between the Sacred and Secular* (Oxford: Elsevier Science, 2003), pp. 172-177.

¹⁹ Benson Saler, 'Religio and the Definition of Religion', *Cultural Anthropology* vol. 2, no. 3 (1987), p. 396.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 397-398.

Religion, Wilfred Cantwell Smith observed its designation of both a feeling in man generated by an awful terror of powers outside of man, as well as certain types of public behaviour and socially recognised obligations.²¹ The usage of *religio* among early Christian writers reflected the variety of classical usage, although with the addition of new senses which were still far from precision or consistency. The old sense of *religio* as the feeling of awe was revived occasionally, along with the attitude of the worshipper to the Almighty, but it also came to designate the bond between God and man. In his Latin translation of the Bible, Jerome used it in a few places in the sense of a ritual observance or practice. Lactantius used it to denote a form of worship, contrasting the ‘false’ pagan *religio* with the ‘true’ worship of God in the Christian Church.²² Consistent with this, Augustine famously entitled an early essay *De vera religione*, by which he meant something like ‘on proper piety’ or ‘on genuine worship’.²³ It referred to the patterns of action through which people offered homage and praise to God. The right and proper way to worship God was true religion, found pre-eminently and most perfectly but not exclusively in the Church, whereas false religion was improper worship.²⁴

After Augustine, the term fell into disuse. The medieval Church largely managed without it for over a thousand years. The only sense that is found with any regularity during this period is one which sprouted from the usage already noted in Jerome’s Vulgate, that of ‘rite’. From the fifth century, *religio* became a specialised designation of the monastic life; the ‘religious’ denoted a member of one of the Orders, as distinguished from lay Christians. ‘Religion’ first entered the English language around the turn of the thirteenth century as ‘a state of life bound by monastic vows’, developing by 1400 a plural form that referred to particular monastic orders. Hence ‘the religions of England’ were the various orders.²⁵ Thomas Aquinas discusses *religio* only once in his *Summa Theologiae*; in this brief appearance it denotes a virtue which directs a person to God. It could be distinguished from sanctity, to which it was basically similar, by virtue of its connection to the liturgical practices of the Church. For Aquinas then, ‘The word religion is usually used to signify the activity by which man gives the proper reverence to God through actions which specifically pertain to divine worship, such as sacrifice,

²¹ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, pp. 19-23.

²² Ibid., pp. 23-28. Smith notes that it would be anachronistic to read Lactantius formulations of *vera religio* and *falsa religio* as expressing the later notion of ‘one religion is true and others false’.

²³ Augustine, ‘Of True Religion’, in J.H.S. Burleigh (ed.), *Earlier Writings* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953); Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, pp. 28-30.

²⁴ Paul J. Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 2-3.

²⁵ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, pp. 30-32.

oblations, and the like'.²⁶ Religion was a habit of the body and the soul, a practice undertaken in the community of the Church that shaped virtuous persons and directed their lives towards the good.

Religion was a marginal concept in the thought of Aquinas, and he was not unusual in this regard. Smith notes that in the Middle Ages, despite common perceptions of this period as the most 'religious' in the history of Christendom, nobody ever wrote a book specifically on 'religion'.²⁷ The classical and medieval history of the term is markedly inhospitable to the view that religion is a trans-historical phenomenon; for this reason we must agree with Benson Saler's comment that 'the semantic history of *religio* better serves us as a cautionary parable than as an encouraging paradigm'.²⁸

It is interesting to observe that the conceptual formulation of religion as one dimension of culture among others cannot be found outside of the modern West, or societies that have encountered and adopted structures and ideas of modern Western culture. What should we conclude from this concerning the validity of the particular aspect of the modern discourse of religion with which we are concerned? The question here is whether the absence of any linguistic formulation of religion as distinct from other aspects of life in a certain culture means that no meaningful distinction can be drawn between religion and non-religion. Even if it was not always named as such, could we not say that religion has always existed in some sense as a distinct aspect of life? After all, is there not in every society a *de facto* dualism of religion and non-religion, even when it is not reflexively conceptualised as such?

'Religion' beyond Western Modernity

The assumption that specifically religious dimensions of life can be adequately identified cross-culturally has recently been called into question within the disciplines of religious studies and anthropology. On the basis of his research into Buddhist movements in the Maharashtra region of India, Timothy Fitzgerald has argued that the concept provides no useful analytical purchase. Transcendental goals and beliefs about salvation commonly labelled religious are often implicated in various social and political activities to such a degree that it becomes distorting to make a distinction between religion and non-

²⁶ Quoted in Cavanaugh, "'A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House': The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State", p. 401.

²⁷ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, p. 32.

²⁸ Saler, 'Religio and the Definition of Religion', p. 396.

religion.²⁹ He extends this analysis to Hinduism and to the question of religion in Japan. With regard to Hinduism, he suggests here again that the category 'religion' cannot be taken to describe a set of institutions existing alongside or distinguishable from putatively non-religious aspects of society. He points out that the literature on Hinduism in India deconstructs the category, even as it seeks to use it as making meaningful reference to a specific dimension of life. Commenting on Louis Dumont's observation that the political-economic domain in India is, in the traditional perspective, encompassed in an overall religious setting, Fitzgerald notes that 'religion' here denotes nothing more than the values shared in the specific cultural context. Religion, when it exists at every analytical level, is redundant.³⁰

Fitzgerald's analysis of the case of Japan brings a different set of issues to light. The distinction between religion and the secular is made by the Japanese, but the moment at which they did begin to make this distinction can be located with relative precision as the late 19th century. In their drive to modernise and make Japan a powerful country capable of resisting the threatened colonial encroachments of Westerners, the ruling Meiji elite adopted a number of Western structures and ideas, among which was a distinction between religion and the secular. This formed the basis of a distinction between sect Shinto, residing in an independent sphere of religion where commitment is a matter of free personal choice, and state Shinto which was the dominant national ritual practice, henceforth classified as secular and compulsory for all citizens. The religion-secular distinction, and the imagination of religion as autonomous, did not emerge naturally from indigenous cultural categories but arrived as an integral part of modernisation on a Western model.³¹ One consequence of this has been generations of debate among scholars as to whether state Shinto is a religion; Fitzgerald suggests that this debate does not get us very far because the concept of religion, despite its official adoption, operates at a very superficial level in the Japanese context and does not usefully pick out a distinctive practical reality within Japanese culture.³²

What this tends to suggest is that while there may be a conceptual equivalent for religion in the languages of India and Japan, the extent to which it can be said to denote a

²⁹ Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, pp. 121-133.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 134-155. Comment on Dumont at 146.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 159-167; Timothy Fitzgerald, 'Religion' and 'the Secular' in Japan', *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies*, no. 3 (2003). The case of Japan is also discussed in Beyer, 'Defining Religion in Cross-National Perspective: Identity and Difference in Official Conceptions', pp. 172-174. On the adoption of 'religion' by East Asian states see Baker, 'World Religions and National States: Competing Claims in East Asia'.

³² Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, pp. 167-180.

discrete cultural sphere in these contexts can be doubted. Where the idea has been institutionalised, this move appears more closely connected to an adaptation to Western social norms and structures than the development of an indigenous notion. The absence of anything that approximates the modern Western religious-secular distinction in many of the everyday practices and institutions of these cultures suggests that the distinction is only found to the extent that Western norms have penetrated the fabric of society. Overall, this picture encourages suspicion towards any assumption that religion is a natural human category existing beyond Western modernity.

'Religion' in Western Christendom

So much for the notion of religion as a transcultural phenomenon. But what of the suggestion that while it may be a peculiarly European cultural achievement, the concept of religion predates modernity and the onset of secularisation in the West? This is a plausible claim, and is worthy of some attention given the frequency with which the terms 'religion' and 'secular' are deployed when describing the Middle Ages.

The manifold dualisms that litter the medieval conceptual landscape add plausibility to the claim that Christianity has always recognised a distinction between the religious and the secular: the city of God and the earthly city, the spiritual and the temporal, nature and grace, natural and supernatural, God and Caesar (Matthew 22:21, Mark 12:17).³³ Carlson and Owens write that in the medieval era, 'religion and politics were cooperative partners, not antagonists (although antagonism was known to erupt concerning their respective spheres of influence)'.³⁴ A more developed account of inherent dualisms in the medieval world is proposed by José Casanova, who suggests that pre-modern Western Christendom was structured by a double dualist system of classification. First, there was a dualism between 'this world' (earth) and the 'the other world' (heaven). Then there was a second division: 'this world' was further divided into the religious and secular worlds. 'In modern secular categories', he writes, 'we would say that there was a natural reality and a supernatural reality. But the supernatural realm itself was divided between nonempirical supernatural reality proper and its symbolic,

³³ For a statement of this view, see Jacob Neusner, 'Retrospective on Religion and Politics', in Jacob Neusner (ed.), *God's Rule: the Politics of World Religions* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), pp. 258-259.

³⁴ John D. Carlson and Erik C. Owens, 'Reconsidering Westphalia's Legacy for Religion and International Politics', in John D. Carlson and Erik C. Owens (eds.), *The Sacred and the Sovereign: Religion and International Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), p. 13.

sacramental representation in empirical reality'.³⁵ Does not this distinction between the natural and supernatural realities, with the Church as a mediating institution with a foot in each, represent a theoretical separation of religious and secular concerns in the medieval mind, the *de facto* existence of religion?

The answer is no. Medieval Christendom was, for much of its history, a culture in which the autonomy of politics, trade and community life was never assumed. There simply were no secular spheres to be desacralised. In the Middle Ages there was nothing that corresponded to the modern distinction between the religious and the secular as spaces or domains into which different aspects of life can be slotted. To read the medieval world in these terms is not only anachronistic, but misses the historical contingencies by which this way of thinking emerged. 'Once', as John Milbank argues, 'there was no "secular."' And the secular was not latent, waiting to fill more space with the steam of the "purely human", when the pressure of the sacred was relaxed. Instead, there was the single community of Christendom, with its dual aspects of *sacerdotium* and *regnum*'.³⁶ The *saeculum* referred not to a space but a time – the interval between the fall and the eschaton, in which coercive justice and private property were tragically necessary to deal with the more deleterious actions of unredeemed humanity. Charles Taylor describes the medieval Christian sense of the secular in this way:

Saeculum, the ordinary Latin word for century, or age, took on a special meaning as applied to profane time, the time of ordinary historical succession, which the human race lives through between the Fall and the Parousia. This time was interwoven with higher times, different modes of what is sometimes called 'eternity'. The time of the Ideas, or of the Origin, or of God. Human beings were seen as living in all of these times, but certain acts, or lives, or institutions, or social forms could be seen as more thoroughly directed towards one or another. Government was more 'in the *saeculum*' by contrast with the Church, for instance.³⁷

The divisions between pope and emperor, temporal and spiritual powers, and lay and clerical roles did not conform to a distinction between action furthering sacred ends and action undertaken for purposes that were purely secular in the moderns sense, for even aspects of life not directly under the control of the ecclesiastical hierarchy formed part of

³⁵ Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, p. 14.

³⁶ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 9.

³⁷ Taylor, 'Modes of Secularism', pp. 31-32.

an order whose principle end was defined by Christianity: the forging of relations characterised by charity and peace. While some concerns, such as those related to politics, were regarded as more worldly – belonging more to the time of the *saeculum* – but they were never conceived as secular in the modern sense of self-sufficient, indifferent and neutral in relation to ‘religious’ matters.³⁸ There was no notion of a zone of activity that might be considered a human constant, in which activity is oriented towards the achievement of purely ‘natural’ goods of finite well-being that can be distinguished clearly from and potentially conflict with a supernatural end of preparing the righteous for the life of heaven.

In neither theory nor practice was religion conceived as one among a number of dimensions of life. This was predicated on a theological cosmology which conceived a particular relationship between God and the world. The prevailing worldview of the early-high Middle Ages was based on a ‘metaphysics of participation’. What was meant by this? Crudely stated, it meant that created things do not exist autonomously – they do not exist in themselves, for only God exists in himself. The existence of created things cannot be understood in terms of a brute contrast between existence and non-existence, for only God exists fully without qualification. This view was based on a Christian incorporation and transformation of the Platonic theme of participation, in which all things were understood as participating in the divine, in such a way that the transcendent was understood to be present in every aspect of immanent life. This view was Christianised by the Church fathers into an understanding of creation as participating in the Creator.³⁹ Creatures combine being and nothingness in varying degrees, and possess their being only through their participation in God, whose essence is being. God and creatures were conceived as ontologically different, and yet analogically related, insofar as all that ‘is’ in created beings entirely derives from Being as a donating source. Finite things do not fully exist in the same sense in which God exists and, by extension, cannot be said to possess other universal properties such as ‘truth’, ‘goodness’ and ‘beauty’ in the same sense in which God can be said to possess them. Within this way of thinking, the ground of created things is God – they only exist insofar as they are ‘in God’, and to know them truly is to know God. In Milbank’s words, ‘created being is only a gift; only exists as *sharing* in divine existence and as perpetually *borrowing* this existence’.⁴⁰

³⁸ John Milbank, ‘The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority’, *New Blackfriars* vol. 85, no. 996 (2004), p. 217.

³⁹ As David Burrell demonstrates, this Platonic legacy was shared by the Jewish and Islamic traditions until at least the thirteenth century. See David Burrell, *Faith and Freedom* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

⁴⁰ Milbank, ‘The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority’, p. 221. Italics in original.

This was the traditional view inherited by theological luminaries of the high Middle Ages such as Anselm and Aquinas, in which the world could not be understood *etsi deus non daretur*, or in abstraction from its relationship with God. Because ontology and epistemology could not be considered apart from theology, there was no ‘natural’ reality that was not a participation in God, no sphere of creation in which activity was not oriented beyond the material. God pervaded reality, and yet exceeded it. Philosophy was informed by Christian presuppositions,⁴¹ as was that might now be called ‘political thought’. Earthly political activity could not be understood without reference to this theological ontology, and specifically the historical drama of creation, fall and redemption which tells of the establishment, disruption and restoration of the harmonious participation of human beings in God and in each other. The same participation in God which causes human beings to exist also effects unity among humanity, for human beings were created in the image of God – an image that is the same in one and all. That which unites us with God, unites us with one another. Ruysbroeck was thinking in this tradition when, in the fourteenth century, he wrote that

The heavenly Father created all men in his own image. His image is his Son, his eternal Wisdom...who was before all creation. It is in reference to this eternal image that we have all been created. It is to be found essentially and personally in all men; each one possesses it whole and entire and undivided, and all together have no more than one. In this way we are all one, intimately united in our eternal image, which is the image of God and in all of us the source of our life and of our creation.⁴²

Because union with God is so crucial for human unity, every disruption of the former is at the same time corrosive of the latter. The fall – the breach with God – was accompanied necessarily by division and strife among humankind. Redemption was correspondingly understood within this tradition as the restoration of unity with God, but equally as unity among men. Peace was a real theoretical possibility because differences were conceived not as oppositional, equivocal, ‘wholly other’ – under whose terms difference enters the common cultural space to compete, overthrow or expel – but

⁴¹ As the work of Etienne Gilson demonstrated. See for example Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955).

⁴² Quoted in Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), p. 30.

as harmoniously related analogically.⁴³ The possibility of harmony among men is itself guaranteed ultimately by participation of all reality in the infinite harmony and relationality of the Trinitarian God.⁴⁴

At a theoretical level human social life was therefore shaped, in its ordering, by 'a vision of social harmony directed towards the *telos* of divine friendship...undergirded by an ontology that refused both Gnostic dualisms, which opposed the transcendent to the immanent, and atomistic materialisms, which flattened the world to sheer immanence'.⁴⁵ This intimate connection between ontology and social vision can be exemplified by reference to a theologian whose influence on medieval thinking is difficult to overstate. In Augustine's rough-sketched and fragmentary political thought, there is no consistent distinction between sacred and secular or public and private. In his reflections on the earthly city and the city of God, Augustine was not concerned with specifying the relations that should pertain between two distinct kinds of human association with fundamentally different agendas, but with reflecting on the proper form of corporate human life in the light of his understanding of the final goal of human life as such. The spiritual and the political are not separate concerns with their own agendas, for the spiritual is the authentically political.⁴⁶ It is often pointed out that Augustine repudiates the classical Greek understanding of the political community as the moral community through which the good life becomes available through the shaping of our minds and wills through association with other rational creatures.⁴⁷ As Rowan Williams emphasises though, this is not the starting point for a rejection of the public realm, but the first move in a redefinition of the properly political, shared life as only authentically realised through the Christian community itself. Augustine defines the central impulse in human nature as an unquenchable desire for God and his truth. Because human beings are made for the quest and the enjoyment of God, the truly just society, the society in which humanity receives its greatest possible degree of fulfilment (during this mortal life), is that in which we are directed through our goals towards our maker.⁴⁸

⁴³ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, pp. 279, 290.

⁴⁴ William T. Cavanaugh, 'The City: Beyond Secular Parodies', in John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 183-185; Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, pp. 25-33.

⁴⁵ James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 88.

⁴⁶ Rowan Williams, 'Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the City of God', *Milltown Studies* vol. 19 (1987), pp. 57-58.

⁴⁷ R.W. Dyson, *Normative Theories of Society and Government in Five Medieval Thinkers* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 2003), pp. 22-23.

⁴⁸ Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. XIX; Williams, 'Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the City of God', p. 58.

On Williams' reading, Augustine in *The City of God* conceives of the political community as purposive, existing so as to nurture a particular kind of human life. The aim of rule in this community is to restore rebellious human wills to a state closer to that which has been divinely intended: a state of right ordering, a state of peace that is 'a perfectly ordered and perfectly harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God, and of one another in God'.⁴⁹ This right ordering is not only a matter of relations between people but also involves the right ordering of our internal lives, including the dominance of the soul over the body, and rightly-directed reason over passion. For this reason, those who exercise authority, those who have a care for the rest, have a duty towards spiritual nurturing. The primary site for such business is the household, but this also has a bearing on how the Christian emperor should rule: through analogy with the household, the commonwealth as a whole is redefined as a sphere of pastoral concern, and its ruler as a 'director of souls'.⁵⁰ Unlike later apologists for papal supremacy, Augustine did not conceive of temporal rulers as properly falling within the institutional clutches of the church. Nevertheless, his conception of political rule did not admit of any formally secular sphere indifferent to religious concerns, but revolved around a specifically Christian understanding of the true ends of government.

Theory and practice are inseparable, and so the standpoints taken on practical political questions tended to reflect a consensus that Christianity provided the context of human life, rather than being one element among others in that life. For example, the disagreement perennially recurring between the fifth and thirteenth centuries over the proper relation between *regnum* and *sacerdotium* should not be misinterpreted as a conflict about 'Church' and 'State'. *Regnum* and *sacerdotium* refer not to discrete corporations or entities with natural spheres of operation, but to two kinds of power within a single body – the body of Christendom. The conflict was not a boundary dispute over where to draw the line between the religious and the secular, but one of how these powers should be related within the body. The principle of dual power, by which the Church was ordained to rule spiritual things and princes to rule temporal things, was taken as normative for much of the period, but left questions unanswered over how exactly they were related. Popes tended to interpret their relation hierarchically; invoking the Platonic theme of the superiority of spirit over matter, they argued that spiritual power should, according to the natural order of things, take precedence over temporal power. These claims, articulated in a somewhat random fashion within letters, papal decrees and polemical pieces, were

⁴⁹ Augustine, *City of God*, pp. XIX, 17.

⁵⁰ Williams, 'Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the City of God', p. 65.

later developed by figures such as John of Salisbury and Giles of Rome into fully-elaborated 'theoretical' claim that all earthly authority, in temporal as well as spiritual affairs, belongs ultimately to the Church.⁵¹

Supporters of royal autonomy tended to construe the doctrine of the two powers rather differently: as a recognition that monarchs were directly ordained by God and not accountable to any earthly superior for their official acts on earth. And yet even affirmations of royal independence did not make their activity 'non-religious', for monarchs, although lay figures, still participated in a liturgical order. It should be remembered the king, the supreme layman, was anointed and up until at least the eleventh century was considered to be human by nature and divine by grace, the imitator and the image of Christ.⁵² Thus although there were counter-tendencies pushing against attempts to assert the institutional supremacy of the Church, they cannot properly be interpreted as 'contesting the boundaries between the religious and the secular' in any modern sense, for the king did not occupy an unambiguously secular standpoint.

At a less exalted level, ordinary laypersons were involved in ritual practices throughout their daily lives, which were lived out in time and space which itself mediated the transcendent. They worked and worshipped in a landscape in which sacred space was nearly ubiquitous and highly accessible: the shrine on the bridge or at the crossroads, the holy well, the altar at home or the cairn. Sacred space was not restricted to the church, and other sacred sites in the community often had equivalent standing. In a similar fashion, time was understood in terms of both linear movement towards the eschaton, and the cyclical rhythms of the liturgical year, which structured lives by a complex series of calendrical rituals. The shared sense of temporal regularity produced a religiosity that was inherently communal rather than individual, and the holy was inextricably entwined with everyday, mundane activities.⁵³ This order found institutional expression through the lay fraternities and craft guilds, formed under the patronage of particular saints, which incorporated the individual into a ritualised social collective whose principal goal was the attainment of a state of charity, meaning social integration. Through the practice of certain rituals of salutation and feast-making which stressed love, peace, and charity,

⁵¹ Dyson, *Normative Theories of Society and Government in Five Medieval Thinkers*, pp. 1-185.

⁵² Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 42-86; Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, (eds.), *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 169-230.

⁵³ Meredith B. McGuire, 'Contested Meanings and Definitional Boundaries: Historicizing the Sociology of Religion', in Arthur L. Greil and David G. Bromley (eds.), *Defining Religion: Investigating the Boundaries Between the Sacred and Secular* (Oxford: Elsevier Science, 2003).

they attempted to institutionalise the Christian principle of fraternal peace through establishing bonds of kinship that went beyond consanguinity. The institutions of marriage and godparenting also participated in this liturgical order, in which social integration and peace among feuding families and groups was fostered not through contractual agreements but the spread of alliance and kinship beyond blood-ties.⁵⁴

Catherine Pickstock writes that

sacramental and liturgical practices were so central to medieval culture that one can view them as in some sense constitutive of the social realm...There was simply no duality of the liturgical and the mundane, just as the dichotomy of public and private was foreign to the medieval mind. Such specifically ecclesial occasions as the celebration of the Mass, processions, festivals, and pilgrimages, extended beyond themselves. For all forms of social interaction were themselves embedded in a structure of worship, ritual, and charity.⁵⁵

The inseparability of the sacred and profane within many social and economic practices should be understood in the context of patristic and medieval soteriology. Salvation was not simply an individual matter, concerned with this world as much as the other world. Redemptive charity was a state that pertained between people, rather than an individual virtue. It was the establishment of a state of reconciliation between individuals, an active and personal alliance rather than a private feeling of abstract beneficence.⁵⁶ The ultimate aim of these structures was therefore salvific: the achievement of reconciliation among human beings and between man and God, through the forging of social bonds that participate in God's redemptive action in creation.⁵⁷ Social integration was not simply a consequence of attempts to unite communities in a sacramental and liturgical order, but also an end in itself.

There were thus no real theoretical lines of division between the sacred and the secular, and in practical terms, this means that the Church was never indifferent to the ways in which political rule was exercised, economic life was conducted, and social institutions were organised. Practical ecclesial involvement in economic and social

⁵⁴ John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 14-34, 57-75; Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 140-158.

⁵⁵ Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, p. 146.

⁵⁶ Milbank, 'The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority', p. 216; Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, p. 144. For an extended argument to this effect, see Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*.

⁵⁷ Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700*.

matters was considerable; monasteries were farms, ran schools, hospitals and places of retirement for the sick, the aged, the blind and for lepers. The Church maintained bridges which functioned simultaneously as crossing points and shrines to the Virgin Mary. It concerned itself with the development of virtue, which had in former times been the province of the classical *polis*. From Augustine onwards, there were attempts to infuse ostensibly secular practices such as warfare, trade, punishment, and feudal tenure with the Christian virtues of mercy and forbearance. It is true that the church as an institution tended to abstain from most of these practices; the Christian rejection of a detailed religious law as a necessary component of the mechanics of salvation, as well as the association of political power within sin, tended towards the view that the coercive sword of justice was a function of temporal authority that could only have been inappropriately wielded by clerical hands. However, the division between the pastoral functions of the priest and the judgemental tasks of the king was never a complete one. The Church did not reject the necessity of coercion, and even directly exercised some itself. Similarly, the warrant for its just deployment in extra-ecclesial matters was in the final instance a theological one: the restoration of a peace that goes beyond a mere compromise between wills.⁵⁸

Recognising that there was no such thing as religion (in the modern sense) in the Middle Ages is not to deny that people worshipped, prayed, made pilgrimages, believed in gods, went to church, burned heretics and schismatics, feasted and so forth. What it does involve is the acknowledgement that these activities can only be defined as 'religion', as expressions of a unified phenomenon distinct from other aspects of life, as part of a particular discursive categorisation of these practices and beliefs as equivalent and sharing some identity not shared by other phenomena: expressions of a single phenomenon or dimension of human experience. Accepting the argument that there was no secular does not commit one to believing that our medieval forebears were intensely pious or spent all their time in church. Yet it does involve the acknowledgement that to define certain realities as secular, in the sense of non-sacred or non-religious, having their own internal principles and laws of autonomous operation, is to privilege a particular discursive imagination of the world that makes a distinction between the sacred and the secular.

⁵⁸ Milbank, 'The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority', pp. 215-217; R.W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (London: Penguin, 1970), pp. 214-299. On coercion, see Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, pp. 423-429.

2.3 Secularisation as the Production of ‘Religion’

In the first section of this chapter, I suggested that the notion that religion is a discrete aspect of culture acquires its plausibility to some degree from its affinity with the situation of religion in modern liberal societies. In the second section I argued that it would be complacent to draw from this situation the conclusion that religion is always and everywhere imagined or institutionalised as a sub-domain of culture. This section addresses a literature that tends, in practice, to regard religion as a valid, universal category even before and beyond modernity. Weberian-influenced accounts of secularisation assume that an analytical distinction between the religious and the secular can be made through time and space, even in contexts where no such distinction is empirically obvious. I shall suggest that this move itself tends to naturalise modern, Western structural differentiation, but does so not through assuming that this differentiation is actual in other parts of the world, but on the basis of the metaphysical assumption that religion is a thing with an unchanging essence. If no such assumption is made, however, then it must be concluded that the very idea of ‘religion’, and the distinction between religious and secular phenomena, is a product of the secularisation process itself.

It is important to clarify what is meant by secularisation, for usages of the concept have tended to conflate a number of separate propositions which are not all necessarily connected. In an influential contribution to the secularisation debate, José Casanova identified three separate propositions which have been routinely conflated in accounts of secularisation processes. He suggested that the conflation of these three elements has resulted in considerable confusion among both its proponents and detractors. He summarises his argument in these terms:

A central thesis and main theoretical premise of this work has been that what usually passes for a single theory of secularization is actually made up of three very different, uneven and unintegrated propositions: secularization as differentiation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms, secularization as decline of religious beliefs and practices, and secularization as marginalization of religion to a privatised sphere. If the premise is correct, it should follow from the analytical distinction that the fruitless secularization

debate can end only when sociologists of religion begin to examine and test the validity of each of the three propositions independently of each other.⁵⁹

Casanova describes the failure to distinguish between these propositions as a fallacious confusion, in which actually existing historical processes of secularisation were conflated with the alleged and anticipated consequences which these processes were expected to have upon religion. We can recognise here two features from the account of religion in modernity sketched above: differentiation and privatisation. The essential core of the secularisation thesis, for Casanova, is the idea of differentiation, which ‘remains a modern structural trend’.⁶⁰ A similar distinction between various dimensions of secularisation was made by Karel Dobbelaere. He discriminated between three, which operate at different levels of society: the societal, the organisational and the individual. At the societal level, the key dynamic and indicator of secularisation is differentiation; at the organisational level it can be discerned in terms of levels of activity among religious organisations, and at the individual level the key indicator is individual religiousness.⁶¹

This chapter is centrally concerned with the proposal that religion is one dimension of culture among others; as a result, it is the idea of differentiation that I am interested in – the separation of religion from secular spheres, and the development of an autonomous religious realm. I am not concerned with the question of whether religion is in decline, or whether differentiation or privatisation necessarily lead to falling levels religiousness. It is simply relevant for my purposes to note that societal differentiation is an accurate description of a modern trend, and a key dimension (*the* key dimension, according to Casanova) of the historical process of secularisation. But how should this process be interpreted?

According to the differentiation narrative favoured by those who follow Weber, it should be interpreted as a process by which what is essentially political, essentially scientific, essentially artistic etc, is freed from what is essentially religious. On the basis of this *a priori* claim to know the true nature of politics, science and art – and to know that these are different to and not to be confused with the true nature of religion – it becomes possible to assume religion is a valid category of political and analytical discourse, even in contexts where there is no indigenous categorisation or practical division of culture into religion and non-religion. Within this paradigm, from the observation that the medievals

⁵⁹ Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, p. 211.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 212.

⁶¹ Davie, *The Sociology of Religion*, pp. 49-50.

had no conception of religion as a discrete aspect of culture, it does not necessarily follow that there was no such thing as religion. It merely means that they had yet become conscious of the true nature and autonomy of the various life-spheres. This is clear from Weber's essay 'Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions', in which he writes of permanent tensions between 'religion' and the various orders of 'the world' that become increasingly apparent as consciousness emerges of the specific rationality inherent in each of the spheres. There is, he suggests for example, a 'mutual strangeness of religion and politics, when they are both completely rationalized'.⁶²

The history of secularisation, the separation of distinct sub-systems or life spheres in Western modernity, is therefore represented as the realisation of an objectively valid and rational social and political order that fully realises the essences, not only of politics, science and the economy but also of religion itself. The particular developmental path taken by society and politics in the West becomes the gradual realisation of the true nature of the various life-spheres. As John Milbank describes this way of thinking, 'the division of labour, and more precisely the particular form taken by the division of labour in modern Western history, is regarded as an objective instrument of classification, the bringing to social awareness of an objective separation of spheres'.⁶³

Of course, Weber et al. may perhaps be correct in their supposition that secularisation brings into sharper focus the true nature of religion as distinct from other human activities, but we should be clear about the basis on which the claim is made. It cannot be that all cultures actually make distinctions between religious and secular phenomena. As the analysis of the last section sought to demonstrate, the claim that religion is transhistorically one dimension of culture among others cannot be made on the basis of an empirical observation that human beings naturally tend to distinguish between the religious and the secular, because there are always exceptions to this – indeed, it appears that the modern Western habit of making such a distinction is, in historical perspective, itself an exception. The claim can only be sustained on the basis of an *a priori* assumption that religion has its own essence, not to be confused with that of the other life spheres. If, by contrast, it is not assumed that religion has an essence, then the existence of religion as a separate domain must be considered inseparable from the process of construction in which it was imagined and institutionalised in liberal modernity.

⁶² Weber, 'Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions', p. 335.

⁶³ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 129.

There is a difficulty though in assuming the religion has an essence all of its own, if this essence can only be discovered empirically by abstracting the essence of differentiated religion as it has been realised in Western modernity. The problem is that there are no secure grounds for asserting that the essences of religion and politics and so forth as they have been imagined and institutionalised in Western modernity actually represent their real essences, or even disclose essences at all. There are no necessary grounds for concluding that differentiation realises the essence of these activities, as opposed to being the contingent upshot of their construction through changes in language and institutions. The assertion that secularisation is a bringing to consciousness of the true nature of religion is no more rationally demonstrable than the argument that it is only through the secularisation process that religion is constructed as an object in itself, different to other human activities. The claim that there is always and everywhere a realm of 'religion' with its own identity, norms and logics (however much it may be confused with other social spheres in specific contexts) can always be contested with the counter-assertion that this is nothing more than a false universalisation of the contingent construction of such a realm in Western modernity.

The insistence that religion is a thing in itself is therefore characteristic of Weberian versions of the secularisation paradigm. To advocate the incorporation of religion into international politics as a variable with its own unique character does not escape from the secularisation paradigm, but repeats one of its central assumptions: that religion is a thing with an unchanging essence. Furthermore, if there is no such eternal essence, if religion only exists in modernity because it has been constructed by human beings as a realm distinct from other realms, then the move to bring religion into IP risks reifying the product of a particular path of cultural development as a natural and universal phenomenon.

The notion that religion is transhistorically one dimension of culture among others is not only descriptive, however, but prescriptive also. It provides a powerful legitimisation of the social and political structures of the modern West, and functions to delegitimise alternative social orders that do not exhibit differentiated life-spheres. This normative element can be detected in Weber's discussion of the process, in which both religious and secular spheres are 'freed' to realise their true natures, as his discussion of the sphere of politics clearly reveals. 'He who seeks the salvation of the soul, of his own and of others', Weber wrote, 'should not seek it along the avenue of politics, for the quite

different tasks of politics can only be solved by violence'.⁶⁴ To confuse the religious and secular spheres such as politics, Weber suggested, is not only foolish but downright irresponsible; for example, the deontological ethics of religion will have disastrous results in politics, where the ethic of responsible concern for consequences should reign supreme. Any social order – such as that of medieval Christendom – in which the operation of 'secular' life-spheres is infused and transformed by norms and virtues extrapolated from 'religious' narratives must, from this perspective, conjure the image of an illegitimate or irrational religious overlay stifling the secular, or a confusion out of which arose the gradual recognition of the true nature and distinctiveness of the religious and the secular.

The evaluation of structural differentiation as desirable and rational can also be clearly seen in other post-Weberian definitions of the phenomenon. In an influential contribution to the literature, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann defined it as 'the progressive autonomisation of societal sectors from the domination of religious meaning and institutions'.⁶⁵ Steve Bruce, one of the foremost contemporary defenders of the secularisation paradigm, describes one aspect of it as 'the declining importance of religion for the operation of non-religious roles and institutions such as those of the state and the economy'.⁶⁶ Clearly, to represent the presence of religious meaning and institutions in various aspects of life in terms of 'domination', and to define the state and the economy from the outset as 'non-religious', is to present secularisation as the midwife of a more natural and liberated state of affairs, in which (as Casanova puts it) 'the secular spheres emancipated themselves from ecclesiastical control as well as from religious norms'.⁶⁷ The approach to secularisation theory exemplified by Weber and others therefore functions as both an empirical description of modern social processes and a normative prescription, ideologically legitimating the autonomous operation of the various life spheres characteristic of modernity. Casanova puts it bluntly: 'In modern societies it is both unlikely and undesirable that religion should again play the role of systematic normative integration'.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Weber, 'Politics as a Vocation', p. 126.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West*, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

⁶⁷ Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, p. 40.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 43. Casanova's position is interesting. On the one hand he seeks to defend the differentiation characteristic of modern societies, suspicious of any attempt by religion to 'impose its agenda on society of to press its normative claims upon the autonomous spheres'. On this other hand, he sees some types of religion as playing a potentially important public role through contesting the pretensions of secular spheres to function 'without regard to moral norms or human considerations' (Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, p. 43.). The potential public role of religion is circumscribed to bringing 'moral' or 'human'

The insistence that religion must be taken seriously *as religion* has strong affinities with this construction of modern differentiated societies as more liberated and more natural. The ‘naturalness’ of the norms and principles of secular spheres is often expressed through what Charles Taylor refers to as ‘subtraction stories’:

Concisely put, I mean by this stories of modernity in general, and secularity in particular, which explain them by human beings having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves from certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge. What emerges from this process – modernity or secularity – is to be understood in terms of underlying features of human nature which were there all along, but had been impeded by what is now set aside.⁶⁹

John Milbank refers the same idea as the myth of ‘desacralisation’, which he describes as ‘a metaphor of the removal of the superfluous and additional to leave a residue of the human, the natural and the self-sufficient’.⁷⁰ The assumption here is that the secular was always there in some sense, and that the process of secularisation merely stripped these spheres of their sacral allure and misplaced ecclesial restrictions. Put in these terms, secularisation takes on the appearance of ‘the perennial destiny of the West’, a natural development that brought religion to its true essence by letting the spiritual be the spiritual, without public interference, and the public be secular without private or priestly prejudice.⁷¹

To continue to insist that ‘religion’ is a valid category, even in contexts where evidence of the cultural imagination and institutionalisation of this phenomenon is lacking, one must resort to the idea that religion has a universal essence. The fact, however, that it is only in the context of Western-style modernity that such an idea has been entertained must give pause for thought. One suspects that what is being represented as a liberated essence is no more than the contingent construction of one culture. In the rest of this chapter I shall outline an alternative understanding of the secularisation process that makes no necessary assumptions about the more natural or liberated character of modern societal structures, and does not presume that religion has an essence persisting independently of its description and definition.

norms, that are not specifically religious norms. It is highly questionable, however, whether there can be any ‘human’ and ‘moral’ norms that are not the norms of one tradition or other.

⁶⁹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), p. 22.

⁷⁰ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 9; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 22.

⁷¹ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, pp. 9-10.

It is *just as possible* to interpret the absence of the religious-secular divide in the Middle Ages as indicative that this discourse had yet to be invented; if the identity of Church activity as 'religious' and governmental business as 'secular' only emerged as part of a certain system of meaning, the historicity of discursive frameworks precludes any prior assumption that the religious-secular divide existed before the discourses in which it was articulated and produced. As Milbank puts it, 'there is no secular in our sense outside liberalism, and...therefore before the invention of this discourse, there was nothing waiting to be articulated'.⁷² From this perspective, there is no reason to assume that there were a set of essentially secular realities struggling to escape Church control or an alien 'religious overlay' outside of a particular discursive coding which constitutes the nature of politics as essentially independent in relation to religion, and vice versa. Neither are there grounds for assuming that there is really a sphere of activity called 'religion' within but not co-extensive with Indian or Japanese culture, existing independently of the widespread acceptance, institutionalisation and enactment of discourses which constitute culture in these places as being divisible into religious and secular realms. Religion as a differentiated sphere is something that has been produced historically.

According to this alternative narrative, the secularisation process can be understood as the discursive imagination of a religion-secular distinction, involving the production of religion as a distinct sphere with its own concerns and the parallel constitution of autonomous secular spheres. Religion and the secular are produced simultaneously in the process of their differentiation as discrete realms. From this perspective, the differentiation of various social spheres (including religion) with their own principles and logics can be accepted as a characteristic feature of modernity without necessarily subscribing to the claim that this represents a more natural or a 'truer' state of affairs. This standpoint is consistent with the alternative Charles Taylor proposes to subtraction stories. Against these, he proposes that 'Western modernity, including its secularity, is the fruit of new inventions, newly constructed self-understandings and related practices, and can't be explained in terms of perennial features of human life'.⁷³ In a similar fashion, Milbank contends that a narrative of desacralisation 'altogether misses the positive institution of the secular'.⁷⁴

This approach understands the production of religion and the secular as discursive, in the sense that it assumes that the meaning of various human beliefs and

⁷² Milbank, 'The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority', p. 217.

⁷³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 22.

⁷⁴ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 9.

practices (whether they are understood as 'religious' or 'secular', or neither) is not pre-given or existing 'out there' in the world, waiting to be discovered, but culturally formed. Our modern description of reality as divisible into the religious and the secular is an interpretation whose meaning and sense is dependent on its formulation in particular communally-shared idioms that, in their continuity through time, can be understood as traditional in nature. Meaning does not exist independently of our discursive articulations of it; it is not independent of histories, societies, languages, traditions, as if 'things are already murmuring meanings which our language only has to pick up'.⁷⁵ It is never fixed, but is historically contingent, socially and culturally embedded, and disseminated through discourse.

Religion only appears historically through a discursive process in which certain things are differentiated from others: religion is distinguished from magic and superstition, from science and from secularism, and from politics, law and morality; the addition of the plural term 'religions' constructs discrete bodies of identifiable beliefs and practices distinguishable from other such systems.⁷⁶ The secular similarly appears only through its differentiation from what is defined as sacred or religious.

The discursive production of religion and the secular is not simply an intellectual or linguistic activity, for they are also constructed through the constant re-enactment of a sacred-secular divide in individual and collective lives. Theory and practice are inseparable. Patterns of human action embody particular conceptions of what there is in the world, how the world works, what goals can and should be pursued; they express conceptions of what actions are legitimate, permissible, necessary or justifiable, and what the consequences are likely to be. Every human action, individual or collective, social or political, bears and expresses more or less theory-laden beliefs and concepts; every piece of theorising and every representation of the world is a political and moral action.⁷⁷ Political and social theory can be comprehended as the explicit formulation of the meanings and interpretations that our actions express and embody.⁷⁸ This is not simply the discursive expression of a real movement constituted outside of discourse though;

⁷⁵ Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', in Robert Young (ed.), *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 65.

⁷⁶ Ivakhiv, 'Toward a Geography of "Religion": Mapping the Distribution of an Unstable Signifier', pp. 169-170.

⁷⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed (London: Duckworth, 1985), p. 61.

⁷⁸ Not only political and social theory: John Milbank proposes that the relationship between religious practice and theological discourse can be understood in these terms. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, pp. 384-388.

theory is not superstructural in relation to everyday life.⁷⁹ It does not simply reflect on a practice that is essentially independent of or prior to interpretation. It feeds back in to the reservoir of socially shared knowledge about how the world is, and how it might be, sustaining the ‘fictions’ that are enacted daily, at local, national, and global levels. Discourse is not therefore ideological, in the sense of disguising realities more fundamental than discourse itself. Interpretations are not epiphenomenal in relation to more basic social and economic processes, but themselves serve to construct and constitute lived experience, which in turn contributes to and fosters the production, reproduction and transformation of culture.⁸⁰

Rather than being the product of abstract social forces pushing the various societal sectors towards the realisation of their true autonomy, the process of secularisation as the production of the religious and the secular is a kind of historical ‘fiction’ – not in the sense that it never happened, but in the sense that it is a mere contingency that is sustained and reproduced because human beings constantly articulate and enact it without always recognising its constructed and artificial rather than natural character.⁸¹ Secularisation only occurs through human cultural productions – the linguistic texts in which the division is articulated, and the institutional structures and behavioural conventions that iterate and re-inscribe the proper domains of ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ activity. Secularisation is not, therefore, a ‘structural trend’ that can be contrasted with a ‘historical option’ (as Casanova represents the difference between differentiation and privatisation);⁸² it is a historical option that has become a structural trend, and yet one that, in the final analysis, remains a historical option.

2.4 Implications: Differentiation and the Politics about Religion

An argument that has frequently been made by IP scholars has been that the neglect of religion in the discipline is a consequence of a widespread acceptance of the secularisation paradigm. Like scholars in other social sciences, it has been charged, IP theorists expected religion to disappear and anticipated that the rest of the world was

⁷⁹ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 110.

⁸⁰ Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice*, p. 114.

⁸¹ Milbank draws a contrast between ‘serious’ and ‘ironic’ fiction. Serious fictions are those enacted rituals through which we live our lives; ironic fictions are what ‘fiction’ conventionally denotes – a secondary, reflective, novelistic or theatrical, distancing from the story being narrated. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, pp. 265-266.

⁸² Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, p. 215.

destined to reproduce the European combination of model of secular modernity in which religion was progressively less significant.⁸³ Similarly, Fox and Sandler's argument that 'this phenomenon of overlooking religion is a peculiarly Western phenomenon' involves the claim that IR theorists have been looking at the politics of non-Western societies through secular Western lenses, developed through their intellectual formation in countries where religion had long been excluded from public life, lenses that blinded them to its continuing importance in other parts of the world.⁸⁴ The insistence that religion is irrelevant to understanding politics is described as a false universalisation of the outcome of modernisation processes in one particular part of the globe, an ethnocentric claim that delegitimises alternative understandings of modernity by treating their difference from the European model in terms of deviation or deficiency. To take religion seriously is a step in the direction of a 'deeper pluralism' and a more just world in which modernisation is not necessarily equated with westernisation.⁸⁵

This may be partially true with regard to secularisation understood as the disappearance of those traditions of belief and practice we call 'religion'. In other ways, however, attempts to incorporate religion as an *a priori* category of political analysis distinct from other dimensions of culture risk reifying a different set of Western-centric assumptions equally dependent on secularisation, albeit understood as structural differentiation. Insofar as scholars of religion in international politics understand religion as an activity with motives and characteristic logics different from secular political action – to the extent that they treat it as an additional factor or variable in their analyses – they will reproduce an assumption specific to Western modernity with its differentiated social spheres. It is only subsequent to the modern event of differentiation that one can talk of the reciprocal influence of religion and politics, or religion and economics.

It is for this reason that John Milbank's critique of Weberian sociology can be extended to the literature on 'religion *and* international politics': 'It takes as an *a priori* principle of sociological investigation what should be the *subject* of a genuine historical enquiry: namely, the emergence of a secular polity, the modern *imagining* of incommensurable value spheres and the possibility of a formal regulation of society'.⁸⁶

⁸³ Dark, (ed.), *Religion and International Relations*; Fox and Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Relations*, pp. 10-12, 14-21; Daniel Philpott, 'The Challenge of September 11 to Secularism in International Relations', *World Politics* vol., no. 55 (2002), p. 81; Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations*, pp. 48-54.

⁸⁴ Fox and Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Relations*, p. 16.

⁸⁵ Thomas, 'Taking Religious and Cultural Pluralism Seriously: The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Society'.

⁸⁶ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 91.

Those who concern themselves with religion in international politics should recognise that 'Social differentiation is a contingent historical event (albeit both immensely widespread and persistent) in Western history, and not the outworking of rationality itself'.⁸⁷ To assume the religious-secular divide to be a universal and natural categorisation of the world reifies the differentiated Western, modern present as being transculturally actual or ideal, or both. Either it assumes from the outset that the distinction between religion and non-religion can be found in every society, or it implicitly prescribes that such a distinction should be made, ideationally and institutionally.

The problem here is three-fold. Firstly, to unreflectively project a notion of differentiated religion on to the rest of the world as being actual or ideal risks both misunderstanding the dynamics of politics at the frayed edges of Western influence. Secondly, one risks losing sight of one's own small contribution or challenge to the process of secularisation. Thirdly, assuming religion to be a separate sphere risks losing sight of the fact that the differentiation process is at the heart of the contemporary politics *about* religion. This in turn highlights the fact that scholarly discussions of differentiated religion are always interventions in a contested political process.

The reasons for this can usefully be explained through a contrast with a different form of constructivism, a contrast that brings to light some of the analytical and political problems with religion as a concept. Jonathan Z. Smith argues for its retention as a valid concept when he suggests that its absence as a native category simply means that religion is a 'term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore theirs to define. It is a second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as 'language' plays in linguistics or 'culture' plays in anthropology'.⁸⁸ This nominalist perspective proposes that 'religion' is nothing but a label attached to different phenomena. In other words, no phenomenon is essentially religious, but phenomena become religious by virtue of being labelled as such. The only thing uniting religious phenomena is their status as members of a set or class of single things – things labelled 'religious'.⁸⁹ Religion is nothing more than a useful instrument of description, a theoretical construction which helps the researcher to interpret her experience. It is an aid to explaining the behaviour of individuals or social groups, and

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Smith, 'Religion, Religions, Religious', pp. 281-282.

⁸⁹ Karl Popper is most closely associated with this approach to concepts. Karl R. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), pp. 27-28.

whose meaning can be adapted where necessary to reduce the complexity of social reality in the service of explanation.⁹⁰ For Smith, it is of no consequence whether a particular phenomenon *really is* religious, or whether those involved in it understand it as religion, for the concept of religion is only a category that helps the researcher make sense of a particular aspect of social reality. It is a construct enabling more powerful description and explanation of the behaviour of social actors or delimiting the area of enquiry.

Yet it is surely naïve to propose that religion is a simply a category that helps us get a better grasp on the social world. Concepts do not simply catalogue and categorise an external reality existing independently of them, but they *do* things. As Peter Winch pointed out in his critique of Karl Popper, such categories cannot be merely explanatory models introduced by the social scientist for her own purposes, for they are social institutions embodying modes of thinking which govern the ways in which people behave:

The idea of war, for instance, which is one of Popper's examples, was not simply invented to *explain* what happens when societies come into armed conflict. It is an idea which provides the criteria of what is appropriate in the behaviour of members of the conflicting societies. Because my country is at war there are certain things which I must and certain things which I must not do. My behaviour is governed, one could say, by my concept of myself as a member of a belligerent country. The concept of war belongs *essentially* to my behaviour.⁹¹

In the same way, religion is not simply an invention that helps Europeans understand rituals, practices and beliefs discovered in other societies, but it enters into but exists as an element of various discourses through which the world is interpreted. Action can only proceed on the basis of interpretations of the world. Patterns of human action embody particular conceptions of what there is in the world, how the world works, what goals can and should be pursued, what actions are legitimate, permissible, necessary or justifiable, and what the consequences are likely to be. Every human action, individual or collective, social or political, bears and expresses more or less theory-laden beliefs and concepts; every piece of theorising and every representation of the world is a political and moral action.⁹² Interpretations are not epiphenomenal in relation to more basic social

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 29, 135.

⁹¹ Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, 2 ed (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 127-128. Italics in original.

⁹² MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 61.

and economic processes, but themselves serve to construct and constitute lived experience, which in turn contributes to and fosters the production, reproduction and transformation of culture.⁹³ As Laclau and Mouffe argued, 'Synonymy, metonymy, metaphor are not forms of thought that add a second sense to a primary, constitutive literality of social relations; instead, they are part of the primary terrain itself in which the social is constituted'.⁹⁴

The first implication of this is that scholars of religion in international politics risk misunderstanding the actions of those whose conceptual vocabulary has no religion-secular distinction, or in which it does not play an important role. Insofar as human actions express and embody particular meanings and interpretations, the absence of any imagined separation between the religious and the secular in a particular culture will be significant for how people behave. This has analytical implications. To ignore native meanings and concepts risks misunderstanding the discursive frameworks through which certain types of actions, political arguments and social orders were and continue to be intelligible to those who make and participate in them. In many cultural contexts, the assumption that religion is a distinct factor or variable in itself may obscure more than it reveals and actually inhibit a fruitful analysis of what is going on. It follows from this that whether or not, or how, a society makes a distinction between religious and secular matters, or whether a culture has any concept of the sacred or the supernatural or the transcendent over against a deacralised or natural or mundane reality should be an object of enquiry, rather than decided from the outset by fiat.

This is not to deny the possibility that religion has become a separate realm of human practice. The interesting fact that a large proportion of the world's population do seem to make a distinction between the religious and the secular must be regarded as significant. With the invention and privatisation of religion, and its confinement to a sphere of its own, a certain degree of institutional separation did gradually take hold. For this reason if for no other, we must reject Timothy Fitzgerald's suggestion that we would be better off abandoning the concept of religion entirely.⁹⁵ To think in terms of a religion-secular distinction may still be useful and valid in some contexts, however inchoate and vague it may be, for it captures a Western, modern, discursive ordering of the world with social and political implications. There is, as a consequence, a certain

⁹³ Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice*, p. 114.

⁹⁴ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, p. 110.

⁹⁵ Timothy Fitzgerald, 'A Critique of "Religion" as a Cross-Cultural Category', *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* vol. 9, no. 2 (1997); Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*.

validity in the treatment of religion as distinct, and it is far from meaningless to study the influence of Islamic ideals and practices on the conduct and imagination of politics in Turkey, or the success of Evangelical Christian groups in shaping the agenda of politics in the United States.

The second implication of the fact that concepts are not purely descriptive is that taking religion and non-religion as analytical categories will always effect some small contribution to the discursive process through which secularisation is perpetuated or challenged. Particular conceptual constructions do not simply reflect on practice that is essentially independent of or prior to interpretation. Concepts are more than simply elements of an interpretative grid used by the analyst to make sense of complex social processes. They shape our self-understandings and organise human relations, defining the terms of our interactions with nature and with each other. Discursive knowledge is politically significant, structuring our understanding of social reality, legitimising and naturalising particular political orders and practices. The notion of religion functions politically to both create and restrict the possibilities for human action, constructing identities and subjectivities. To describe the world in terms of religion and non-religion can never be a neutral, apolitical practice that has no effects ‘out there’ in the world. It feeds back in to the reservoir of socially shared knowledge about how the world is, and how it might be, sustaining the ‘fictions’ that are enacted daily, at local, national, and global levels. If one of these ‘fictions’ is the notion that religion, politics, economics and science are spheres of life characterised by their own goods, in which action is governed by different sets of norms, practice that is designated as religious will tend to dissociate itself from that defined as political – or there will be tensions at the very least. The discourse of differentiated religion will then feed into the actual practice of the religions, constituting the very distinction it claims to discover.

Where religion is assumed to be essentially distinct from politics and economics, describing a belief or practice as ‘religious’ tends to connote ‘not political’ and ‘not scientific’. These discursive connotations shape attitudes and orientations towards those defined as religious, shaping what can legitimately be said and done from a standpoint defined as religious. The religious leader who speaks of politics and scientific ethics meets with suspicion for transgressing the boundaries of his proper competence: *silete theologi in munere alieno!*⁹⁶ As will be discussed in chapter 6, Blair was conscious that the prohibitions work both ways: politicians must mind their own business and keep out

⁹⁶ Alberto Gentili’s injunction that roughly translates as ‘Theologians mind your own business!’

of religion as well. In the British context, this distinction is perpetuated through a whole series of further discursive associations. The religious-secular dualism may connote a distinction between what is private, sectarian, subjective and particular on the one hand, and that which is or should be public, neutral, objective and universal on the other.

The third problem with assuming religion to be a discrete life-sphere is that it can obscure the extent to which this situation is at the centre of the contemporary politics *about* religion. The legitimacy of contemporary societal differentiation is by no means uncontroversial. This is particularly the case in relation to Islam, in which it is often commented the politics and religion are inseparable. Mark Sedgwick has rightly pointed out that ‘The idea that politics and religion are inseparable in Islam has been promoted by groups that believe that they *should* be inseparable’ – what he does not add is that the idea that they are separable has also been promoted by groups that believe that they *should* be separable.⁹⁷

Insofar as the drift towards secularity in the West has been intimately connected to certain strands of thought and practice within Christianity,⁹⁸ Christianity has often been viewed as the tradition that should have least difficulty in coming to terms with social differentiation among all of the so-called ‘world religions’. And yet there are many contemporary theologians who question the legitimacy of the differentiation of spheres and the idea of ‘religion’ as a thing apart.⁹⁹ The differentiation of spheres, it is contended, promotes the idea that it is possible for something to be beautiful without it being good or true, but also the suggestion that power can be exercised legitimately quite aside from the question of whether its actions embody goodness and truth. This denies the traditional Christian affirmation of ‘the convertibility of transcendentals’, in which Being as such is good, true and beautiful, and so what is true is also good and beautiful, and so forth. The separation of life-spheres in modernity, and the insistence that they have their necessary principles, can only be sustained through replacing this principle with the claim that objective knowledge, aesthetic judgment and ethical will are distinct human faculties

⁹⁷ Mark Sedgwick, ‘Al-Qaeda and the Nature of Religious Terrorism’, *Terrorism and Political Violence* vol. 16, no. 4 (2004), p. 797.

⁹⁸ Milbank, ‘The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority’; Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*; Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

⁹⁹ The most high profile expression of this critique has come from the movement known as ‘Radical Orthodoxy’. For an excellent introductory overview, see Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology*. There is a burgeoning body of work associated with the movement; some of the key works include John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); John Milbank, *Being Reconciled* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003); Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*; John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999); Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*; Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (Routledge: London, 2000).

with their own modes of operation.¹⁰⁰ Nicholas Lash has complained that in modernity, public religion is usually constituted as being a matter of taste or subjective 'aesthetic' preference, although it can sometimes also be a matter of ethics (the good). What it can almost never be about is truth.¹⁰¹ Significantly, those advocating these kind of ideas are not marginal figures on the fringes of fundamentalism, but include senior church leaders such as the present Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams,¹⁰² and Pope Benedict XVI.¹⁰³ If even some Christians regard the differentiation of religion with suspicion, how much harder will those of other faiths find it to accept it?

It might be tempting to write off this challenge to social differentiation as no more than an abstract argument being made by academic theologians. But this would be a mistake: it is also being enacted as part of what José Casanova describes as an ongoing deprivatisation of religion around the world. As was discussed in the last chapter, religious groups and movements have become increasingly assertive politically in the last three decades. Upsurges of religion in various parts of the world have made their presence felt beyond the sphere of personal piety by 'going public' in a dual sense. On the one hand, religion has left the place in the private sphere that had been assigned to it, invading the public arena of moral and political contestation; at the same time, by reasserting its presence in the public sphere, it has attracted the attention of the mass media, social scientists, politicians and the general public.¹⁰⁴ A series of key events and developments brought religion into the public eye, and provoked renewed controversy over the place and role of religion in the modern world. One might principally identify here the Islamic revolution in Iran, the rise of the Protestant Christian right as a force in

¹⁰⁰ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 128.

¹⁰¹ 'Religion, in societies that imagine themselves secular, is, like art and music, allowed to be about the Beautiful. Sometimes, it is allowed to be about the Good. What is excluded, by the dominant ideologies, is any suggestion that the business of religion is, no less than that of science, with public truth'. Nicholas Lash, *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 16.

¹⁰² In a lecture series in Westminster Abbey in 2008, Williams spoke of the activities of science and politics in terms which clearly challenged their imagination as wholly autonomous spheres, about which religion has nothing to say. Rowan Williams, 'Archbishop's Holy Week Lecture: Faith and Politics', (2008), <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/1711>; Rowan Williams, 'Archbishop's Holy Week Lecture: Faith and Science', (2008), <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/1710>.

¹⁰³ In his Regensburg address, a speech that would become controversial for other reasons, Benedict laments the modern foundation of knowledge on a narrow, restricted conception of reason that excludes the question of God, and the modern relegation of religion and ethics to the realm of the subjective. Public truth is equated with purely with mathematical and empirical science, and religion with faith and subjective preference only. Benedict suggests that we should not be surprised at the return of extreme, fideist religious movements in a world publicly dominated by formal instrumental rationality, given this dual movement he identifies in modernity in which reason evacuates religion, and the divine is excluded from reason. Pope Benedict XVI, 'Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections', http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html, accessed 10 December 2007.

¹⁰⁴ Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, p. 3.

American politics, the role played by an increasingly active Catholic Church in the so-called 'third wave' of democratisation, the emergence of Hindu nationalism in India, and the increase of terrorist violence associated with Islam, including the attacks of 11 September 2001.

Casanova argues that the deprivatisation of religion can happen in a variety of ways, some of which are consistent with what he sees as the basic requirements of a modern society, such as democratic government and structural differentiation. However, as Talal Asad has cogently pointed out, to the extent that religion is deprivatised and becomes part of modern politics, the principle of structural differentiation – the separation of 'life spheres' – is undermined. A deprivatised religion will not be indifferent to debates about how the economy should be run, which scientific projects should receive public support, or what the broader aims of the education system should be. Deprivatisation inexorably compromises the autonomy of the economy, science and education.¹⁰⁵ If Asad is correct in his critique of Casanova, as I believe he is,¹⁰⁶ then we must reinterpret the resurgence of public religion as also being a contestation of the structural differentiation of society. To reject the privatisation of religion is to call into question the legitimacy or desirability of this differentiation. Neither the privatisation of religion nor the pluralisation and 'emancipation' of life-spheres in modern society can be complacently assumed to be things that everybody agrees upon as desirable, but must be understood as the locus of (often) vehement controversy that encompasses both.

To file such actions under a heading like 'political religion' or 'religious interventions in politics' risks overlooking a major site of contemporary political struggle. To the extent that religious groups are seeking to reshape political, scientific, educational and economic practices in ways consistent with the narratives and themes of their traditions, they are contesting the production of religion as a discrete aspect of culture. The continued imagination of the autonomy of secular spheres and the practice of

¹⁰⁵ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 181-183.

¹⁰⁶ Casanova's position is interesting, but ultimately rests on dubious premises. On the one hand he seeks to defend the differentiation characteristic of modern societies, suspicious of any attempt by religion to 'impose its agenda on society or to press its normative claims upon the autonomous spheres'. On the other hand, he sees some types of religion as playing a potentially important public role through contesting the pretension of secular spheres to function 'without regard to moral norms or human considerations' (Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, p. 43.). The possibility of public religion that does not endanger the differentiation of social spheres rests on the idea that there can be forms of religion that enter the public sphere in the name of 'moral' or 'human' norms (for which we could perhaps read 'universal'), that are not specifically religious norms (for which we could perhaps substitute 'particular'). It will be argued in the final chapter that Tony Blair argues exactly this position; however, it is highly questionable whether there can be any 'human' and 'moral' norms that are not the norms of one tradition or other.

defining religion as something essentially separate and incommensurable implicitly denies the legitimacy of these projects, reinscribing the religious-secular divide. As Foucault argued, discourse is not merely the medium through which political contests are played out, but is itself the terrain that is fought over: 'discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized'.¹⁰⁷ Opposition to the pretensions of secular life-spheres to operate autonomously, and the countervailing rhetoric of those who would restrict religion to its differentiated modern sphere, can be understood as efforts to occupy the discursive heights. Central to this battle is the constitution of religion as *sui generis* – a thing in itself.

Neither the privatisation of religion nor societal differentiation can be taken as apolitical, self-evident or uncontested normative principles in the contemporary world – and this means that the existence of 'religion' is itself, in a very particular sense, the object of controversy. This controversy should not be confused with the shallow, ill-tempered debates between atheists and apologists over the rationality of believing in God. In this controversy, it is not atheists who seek to undermine the foundations of 'religion', but Christians and Muslims. In this controversy, it is secularists who defend the ideal of 'religion'. Recognising the historical contingency and discursive imagination of societal differentiation leads inquiry in a direction that has generally been overlooked in efforts to understand the role of religion in international politics.

It also requires those who study and practice international politics to recognise the politics involved in their own constructions of religion. The notion of differentiated religion is not a neutral description of reality, but a discourse that organises social relations, creating the possibility of certain actions and prohibiting others, as well as actively constituting the differentiated social structures of politics, religion, economics and so on as separate fields of action with their own appropriate logics. The assumption that religion is a discrete phenomenon is always a political intervention in a real-world process that is contested – a process that is at the centre of the contemporary politics *about* religion. Religion can never be an innocent scholarly or descriptive tool, therefore, but tends to re-inscribe and naturalise a particular ordering of society, reifying the modern separation of life-spheres and the ascription of discrete identities to these spheres.

¹⁰⁷ Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', pp. 52-53.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to denaturalise the assumption that religion is one dimension of life among others, such that other dimensions of life are by definition ‘extra-religious’. It has been argued that this notion was dependent on the outcome of a contingent historical process of secularisation. This process involved the re-imagination of nature, politics and economics as autonomous secular realms, and the concomitant invention of religion as the realm of the sacred and the spiritual, as part of the process of social differentiation characteristic of modernity in the West. A further implication of this, that will be explored in more detail in chapter 4, was the secularisation of knowledge about and provision of security. Whereas the realisation of social peace was conceived as dependent on the sacramental and social practices of the Christian community, it came to be regarded as a political responsibility realised through the institutions of the state and the market.

The question of why and how this process came about will be taken up in chapter 4, in which it is argued that a significant impetus for the differentiation of politics and religion was the emerging liberal belief that security was best served by defining the goods of politics and the goods of religion as properly separate. In chapter 6 it will be suggested that this way of imagining the world exercises such a powerful hold on the liberal political imagination that even a figure such as Tony Blair, who testified that his politics was deeply shaped by his Christian belief and has advocated reorienting globalisation processes in accordance with the values of religious traditions, still maintains the importance of respecting the proper domains of religion and politics. Blair’s resolution of this apparent contradiction will also be discussed in the final chapter.

Uncritically reproducing the differentiation of spheres in academic scholarship or political discourse is to contribute to the continuing and yet increasingly contested process of secularisation. It should only be hoisted aloft when one is sailing the seven ‘C’s: that is, a cautious and constant consciousness of its constructed, contingent and contested character. This consciousness is important to maintain, for to unreflectively assume the naturalness of the differentiation of spheres not only contributes to the reproduction of secularisation, but disguises a political intervention as a commonsensical or self-evident statement of fact. The claim that religion is one aspect of culture among others, not to be confused with other factors or variables at work in international politics, can never be a neutral empirical claim or the starting point for an objective and apolitical

analysis. It legitimates a particular ordering of society through an intervention that is all the more powerful for concealing its ideological presuppositions under the garb of commonsense. From this perspective, any ‘religious’ intervention in ‘politics’ is liable to be construed as an illegitimate transgression of boundaries, or a simple misunderstanding of the true nature of both politics and religion.

The recognition that the differentiation of religion is a contested process at the heart of the politics *about* religion directs inquiry towards the discourses through which it is continually imagined and articulated. This will be done in chapters 4 and 6. Understanding religion as a discursive production opens up the possibility of examining the politics of this production – the way in which particular discursive articulations and representations function to reinforce or contest the secular autonomy of various spheres; the location of the boundaries between the religious and the secular that are defined by these iterations; the way in which they partially fix the identity of the religious and its relation to what is secular. Recognising that religion is not discovered but produced also prompts one to ask, in a particular context, why a separate dimension of culture called ‘religion’ is being defined, why is it distinguished from other types of human activity and belief. In chapter 4, I take up these questions in relation to liberal discourses of security, arguing that religion was first imagined as a specific domain as part of attempts to pacify European societies during the seventeenth century. In chapter 6 I argue that Tony Blair’s separation of religion and politics was a consequence of his security-driven attempts to articulate a common ground on which the religions could unite.

In this chapter I have focused on the production of religion as something distinct from the secular. In the next chapter I turn to the second dimension of the modern discourse of religion: the idea that the world is full of religions, which share an abstractable essence, religion in general. I argue that attempts to find a common core among what are conventionally denoted as the religions of the world will always be controversial, due to the essentially contested nature of religion as a concept. In this regard it resembles other contested concepts. However, it is suggested that religion has its own peculiarities as a concept – that is, there are no common features shared by all that is conventionally included in the category that are specific enough to warrant treating religion as a subsection of culture. Definitions are either so broad that they coincide with human culture itself, or they project the features of a particular tradition as being definitive of religion as such.

3 'RELIGION' AND 'THE RELIGIONS' AS CONTESTED CATEGORIES

The argument so far has suggested that what counts as religion is not nearly as straightforward as one might think. In this chapter I will further problematise the modern discourse of religion by examining the idea that 'religion' can be understood as a genus of which 'the religions' are species. This idea is invariably presupposed by studies that seek to understand the relationship between religion and violence – a problem that has been central to its appearance to the security agenda – and was critical for Blair's account of the role of Islam in the 9/11 attacks. Yet the notion of religion as a genus is seriously flawed and obscures the politics involved in any attempt to operationalise it.

The identity of the religious genus will always be contested because there is no neutral standpoint from which to decide what should be included in the category. However, there are more specific problems that flow from the way religion has been imagined in modernity. While it must be admitted that there are certain traditions whose denotation as religion is uncontroversial, there are no commonalities that can be found to unite all of them – no common features, that is, that are not so broad as to expand the category beyond all analytical utility and erase the boundary between religious and non-religious phenomena. This means in practice that attempts to make general statements about what religion is and what the religions have in common fall into one of two traps. Either they are so broad as to identify as 'religious' all of those aspects of human life which involve intersubjectively constructed meaning, or by attempting to be more specific they falsely treat themes and categories from specific traditions as characteristic of all religions. As a consequence, conceptions of religion that assume it to be both a genus *and* a subsection of culture will always be politically contested as biased towards one tradition or other, and cannot be useful as an analytical category in understanding world politics.

The first section outlines the impossibility of objective definitions of religion as a genus, and what is at stake in attempting to provide one. The second section begins to flesh out the argument that genus-and-species definitions of religion are problematic. It explores the conceptions of religion implicitly invoked by scholars of international

politics who take for granted its utility as a concept but do not attempt to define it connotatively. The third section examines the politics involved in conceiving religion as fundamentally a matter of belief, morality or sensory experience. The final section examines the problems that have been encountered in specifying what is distinctive about religious as opposed to non-religious beliefs, moral codes and experiences. It argues that the attempts of those who have outlined operational definitions of religion are invariably excessively general or biased towards a particular confession.

These discussions raise a further question though: why, if the assumption that religion is a genus is so problematic, has it become such a commonplace feature of the conceptual landscape? This question will be taken up in chapter 5, where I suggest that the imagination of commonalities in ‘the religions of the world’ was a theological strategy for mitigating the violence of religious disagreement in the early modern period.

3.1 Defining Religion: An Overview of the Problems

The question of what is meant by ‘religion’ is crucial if it is to be treated as a distinctive phenomenon in world politics. However, these questions have not yet received detailed treatment in international politics, because much of the literature has until now concentrated on arguing for the political relevance of religion and establishing the case for its inclusion in the study of international politics. As will be observed below, many seem to assume that it is obvious what counts as religion. A number of scholars have pressed for clarification in this area though.

Jeffrey Haynes and Nicholas Rengger have both questioned the absence of any discussion of what is meant by religion in Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopoulos’ collection *Religion in International Relations: A Return From Exile*. Haynes criticised the editors and contributors for their failure ‘definitively to define what religion *is* nor how it might usefully be operationalized for analytical purposes’.¹ This was problematic, he continued, because ‘if there is no agreement just what is understood by this key term then how can we be certain that all the contributors are talking about the same thing, understanding it in the same way?’ Nicholas Rengger similarly commented the contributors ‘did not discuss in any detail how to understand religion, as such, nor what it might mean to talk of a religious tradition, as opposed to other kinds of tradition, and

¹ Jeff Haynes, ‘Religion in International Relations: What are the issues?’ *International Politics* vol. 41 (2004), p. 455. Petito and Hatzopoulos, (eds.), *Religion in International Relations: The Return From Exile*.

what the significance of the distinction might be'.² This was a significant issue, he continued, for 'the notion of a religious "tradition" is a lot more complex than it might first appear and...as a consequence a lot more work might be done discussing quite what we mean when we talk of such things if we expect to be able to generate much light about the mutual impact of such traditions and international politics'.³ Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler have also forcefully argued that

In practice many use the form of definition that has in the past been applied to a notably unreligious topic: I may not be able to define it but I know it when I see it. That approach has no practical value. Only a more precise definition can allow a better understanding of which debates over the topic of religion and world politics are due to differences of opinion over how religion influences world politics, and which are due to different understandings of the multifaceted term 'religion' itself.⁴

Fox, Sandler, Rengger and Haynes all propose that more sustained reflection on the meaning of religion is necessary for debate over the role of religion in world politics to properly begin, for only when we agree on what we are talking about can scholarly exchange on the matter bear fruit.⁵ Claims about the relationship between religion and security, about the conditions under which religion contributes to violence, and about the extent to which religion has the potential to contribute to more peaceful social relations are only meaningful if they presuppose some specific notion of religion. This applies equally to wider public debates about the role of religion in politics and the question of whether religious leaders can legitimately comment on economic or political issues, and that of whether 'religious terrorism' is a problem of religion or not.

The need for further consideration of what is being meant by 'religion' becomes more urgent when one observes that *every* invocation of the concept presupposes some implicit definition, even if this involves nothing more than a set of assumptions about what range of phenomena the category refers to. Even scholars who do not explicitly define religion make certain significant assumptions about it. The last chapter discussed

² Nicholas Rengger, 'Eternal Return? Modes of Encountering Religion in International Relations', *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* vol. 32, no. 2 (2003), p. 334.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

⁴ Fox and Sandler, 'The Question of Religion and World Politics', p. 294.

⁵ The same point is made in Hideo Kishimoto, 'An Operational Definition of Religion', *Numen* vol. 8, no. 1 (1961); Hans H. Penner and Edward A. Yonan, 'Is a Science of Religion Possible?' *The Journal of Religion* vol. 52, no. 2 (1972).

one of these: the notion that religious discourse was qualitatively different to political discourse. This chapter explores the second, which posits a certain relationship between 'the religions', treating them as species of a common genus – religion in general. On this model, religion is a generic term formed by abstracting from what are taken to be specific instances of it. It is assumed that they all share certain common features, whose existence justifies treating them as instances of a single phenomenon for the purposes of political theory or analysis.

Chapter 5 will point out that this is not a self-evident mode of classifying those traditions that are now called 'the religions', but is peculiar to modernity. The more immediate issue is that this abstraction process is far from straightforward. Religion is notoriously difficult to define,⁶ so much so that it was once common practice amongst students of religion to point to the appendix of James H. Leuba's *Psychological Study of Religion* (1912), which lists more than fifty definitions, as evidence that defining religion was an impossible task.⁷ The difficulties of this project have not gone unnoticed in international politics. Citing the opinion of church historian Martin Marty, Haynes predicts that 'Scholars will never agree on the definition of religion',⁸ and others have agreed with him.⁹ This chapter proposes that the difficulties in defining religion are linked to two circumstances. The first is that religion shares the qualities of other essentially contested concepts, in that is no indisputable range of phenomena that should be included in the category. The second is more directly linked to the modern conceptualisation of religion as simultaneously a genus – an abstractable essence shared by the religions – and a differentiated sphere of culture. There are no features shared by what is usually included in the category that are specific enough to mark its difference from other non-religious discourses. The most viable definitions are those that erase the religion-non-religion boundary.

⁶ For general philosophical approaches to definition, see Irving M. Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, 6th ed (New York: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 138-176; Richard Robinson, *Definition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950); Takashi Yagisawa, 'Definition', in Robert Audi (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). The best general survey of the formal options in the definition of religion is Bryan C. Wilson, 'From the Lexical to the Polythetic: A Brief History of the Definition of Religion', in Thomas A. Idonopulos and Bryan C. Wilson (eds.), *What is Religion? Origins, Definitions, and Explanations* (Leiden: Brill, 1998). Also helpful are Peter B. Clarke and Peter Byrne, *Religion Defined and Explained* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993); Penner and Yonan, 'Is a Science of Religion Possible?'; Jan G. Platvoet, 'The Definers Defined: Traditions in the Definition of Religion', *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* vol. 2, no. 2 (1990); Smith, 'A Matter of Class: Taxonomies of Religion'.

⁷ Smith, 'Religion, Religions, Religious', p. 281.

⁸ Haynes, *Introduction to International Relations and Religion*, p. 11. See also Haynes, 'Religion, Secularisation and Politics: a Postmodern Conspectus', p. 709.

⁹ Fox and Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Relations*, p. 2; Philpott, 'The Challenge of September 11 to Secularism in International Relations', p. 67.

It is, of course, impossible to prove here that there could never be a satisfactory definition of religion that distinguished it from other aspects of life whilst identifying genuinely common features among the religions. The discussion consequently does not aspire to discuss every conceivable approach to conceptualising religion, but takes as its starting point conceptualisations found in the international politics literature on religion, and discusses them in relation to broader debates about how religion might be approached and defined in the human sciences.

It is important to clarify some of the assumptions that underlie this discussion. As was discussed in chapter 1, this thesis assumes that the religions from which the concept of religion is abstracted are themselves only constituted as social realities through discursive negotiation over the character of those traditions and the character of the practices central to them.¹⁰ The question of whether religion is a genus can only be answered by finding common features in the discourses through which the nature of particular religions are constructed. Insofar as they abstract 'religion' as a common core supposedly shared by 'the religions', different conceptions of religion refer to and purport to describe the discursive practices constitutive of the religions in a given historical situation. Treating religion as a genus involves the claim that one can truthfully or adequately describe identical or analogous features in the variety of actually constituted faiths. If the religions only exist through the discourses that define correct statements of belief and practice, then understanding a particular tradition will involve attention to the specific meanings embodied in its constitutive discourses. If the various traditions are to be usefully subsumed under the overarching category of religion, there must be parallels between the basic organising categories or practices of these various faiths.

If one accepts this as a procedure for deciding on the connotation of religion, there are two reasons why the meaning of the concept will remain highly contested. The first is that religion has the qualities of an essentially contested concept.¹¹ For example, the procedure just outlined assumes agreement over what counts as a religion, but this is far from clear. The religious status of Mormonism was hotly disputed during the nineteenth century, in the same way that Scientology today presents an apparently marginal case. It is not possible to decide with reference to incontestably central cases of 'religion', because how one decides on central cases is equally dependent on what criteria

¹⁰ Asad, 'The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam'; MacIntyre, 'The Essential Contestability of Some Social Concepts'.

¹¹ The preceding discussion has been informed by the issues raised in MacIntyre, 'The Essential Contestability of Some Social Concepts'.

are judged to be definitive of religion. The fact that it is, at present, generally taken for granted that Christianity represents a central case of a religion does not settle the question either, because it raises the suspicion that a religion is merely something that looks like Christianity, and one must then account for why Christianity should be regarded as the paradigmatic example of this category. This in turn requires some criteria for what makes a religion religious. Debates about what counts as a religion are inseparable from normative conceptions of what religion is, and consequently there can be no neutral way of settling dispute over what counts as religion.

The first reason for the inherently controversial nature of claims about religion is therefore that there is no indisputable range of phenomena that can be included in the category. In this regard, religion partakes in the problems that attend other essentially contested concepts, and to ignore this would introduce a normatively ordered concept under the guise of a neutral description. The second reason the concept of religion is controversial relates specifically to the way it has come to be conceptualised in the modern West. Religion, as it has been inherited, is a concept that raises particular difficulties of its own. This is not immediately obvious, and an objection to the above argument could be formulated that proposes that what should be included in the category is actually quite uncontroversial. Conventional usage identifies at least five or six 'world religions' that are generally taken to be central instances of the class. One assumes that it is these Richard Falk has in mind when he generalises about tendencies shared by 'all great religions'.¹² It might be supposed, therefore, that even if questions remain about the religious status of marginal instances such as voodoo or UFO cults, these questions can safely be bracketed to concentrate on traditions that are not only more significant politically, but more obviously and less controversially religious.

This would be a mistake though. Closer attention to the key features proposed as common to what are conventionally assumed to be 'the religions' has tended to undermine any sense that these practices and beliefs are in fact homologous or analogous. Attempts to define religion by reference to the sacred, transcendence, supernatural beings and so forth encounter awkward exceptions; in other cases the categories through which the beliefs and practices of non-Western traditions have been comprehended – such as salvation or worship – are revealed as Western conceptions of what religion involves that are inappropriate in the context of Eastern traditions.¹³ Consequently, the

¹² Falk, 'A Worldwide Religious Resurgence in an Era of Globalisation and Apocalyptic Terrorism', p. 184.

¹³ This is not to say that 'the religions' are entirely heterogeneous. Rather, the claim here is that if any of 'the religions' do share features with each other – a common monotheism among the Abrahamic religions,

history of attempts to define religion has been one of attempting to account for actual diversity through ever greater abstractions. The most viable definitions are that those that are most general, such as 'what binds a society together' or 'a society's discursive projection of the nature of reality'. These are so all-encompassing as to include all human cultural activity though, and religion no longer refers to a discrete social domain.¹⁴

The second problem that makes religion an inherently contentious concept at the present time is therefore the absence of any genuine commonalities universally shared by what is conventionally included in the class. From this it follows that universal definitions of religion, unless they are inoffensively vague, will privilege the categories of some traditions over others. It was argued in the first chapter that the concept of religion is itself exerts a constitutive force on the particular religions it describes, shaping expectations and norms as to the proper character that a tradition can assume in society. If Christianity or Islam (for example) are implicitly treated as paradigmatic of religion as such, there will be a subtle demand for the Christianisation or Islamicisation of other traditions. This demand will be all the more powerful for being concealed within the apparently neutral and non-confessional discourse of 'religion', yet it is likely to provoke resentment and even resistance. The secretly-partisan conception of religion will also have an effect on the distribution of social esteem among religious traditions, as some will naturally appear deviant in relation to the norm.

Three other implications follow from this. Firstly, it has consequences for attempts to describe the relationship between religion and violence. If the meaning of religion is always contested, its relationship with violence will also always be disputed. There is no neutral standpoint from which to decide the terms of any investigation of the subject. If the concept of religion is dependent on normative judgments as to its meaning, this applies even more obviously to concept of violence; nevertheless, they are questions whose answers determine how one responds to the question of how and under what conditions religion becomes violent. The problem of objectivity cannot be resolved simply by definitional fiat – stipulating the terms of the enquiry in advance, because this would simply introduce a different and rival categorisation – a different voice in the debate rather than an escape from it. Furthermore, restricting what should count as a religion on an ad hoc basis, simply to enable generalisations, would trivialise any

for instance – these overlaps are contingent products of mutual influence or a certain shared cultural inheritance rather than necessary expressions of a universal essence.

¹⁴ John Milbank, 'The End of Dialogue', in Gavin D'Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), pp. 176-177.

conclusions that might be drawn about the relationship between religion and violence, because almost any generalisation can be safeguarded from falsification this way.¹⁵

Secondly, a related point is that if the conventional discourse of 'world religions' as species of a common genus assumes a unity that is not there, this means that the concept will obscure more than it illuminates in international politics. If there are no common features that mark off certain traditions and practices as sharing a distinctive religious element not found in other cultural activities, there can be no warrant for treating religion as a distinct variable in political life, or assuming that political behaviour or violence motivated by religion will have an identifiably different logic. General statements about the role of religion in political violence and civil conflict might be applicable to certain traditions in particular contexts, but the variety of discourses that are included within the category as it is usually defined will mean that attempts to generalise will always be undermined by exceptions.

The third implication is that attempts to find a way past inter-religious violence by finding a common ground shared by all of the 'world religions' are likely to founder on the differences between the traditions. These efforts have generally taken one of two forms. The first looks for common features in the speculative, theoretical element of traditions – shared beliefs about the divine, or different perspectives on the same 'ultimate reality'.¹⁶ If there are no genuine commonalities among the beliefs of the religions, though, there is also no necessary reason to suppose that they are different perspectives on the same ultimate reality rather than a projection of different realities. The second approach seeks to found agreement on practical rather than theoretical reason – a consensus on certain universal moral norms and values shared by the 'great world religions'.¹⁷ In order to be demonstrated as truly shared by all these traditions though, these norms must be formulated at such a level of abstraction that they admit of considerable latitude in interpretation. However, their practical interpretation will be inseparably linked to the theoretical discourses through which their purpose and character is specified within each tradition, which reintroduces the problem of heterogeneity. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

¹⁵ MacIntyre, 'The Essential Contestability of Some Social Concepts', p. 8.

¹⁶ See for example John Hick, 'The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity', in John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).

¹⁷ For examples of this, see Hasenclever and Rittberger, 'Does Religion Make a Difference? Theoretical Approaches to the Impact of Faith on Political Conflict'; McTernan, *Violence in God's Name: Religion in an Age of Conflict*. Thomas, 'Taking Religious and Cultural Pluralism Seriously: The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Society', p. 839. For a version of this concerned with overcoming poverty, see Paul F. Knitter, 'Towards a Liberation Theology of Religions', in John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).

Despite this, it is true that because the concept of religion is partially constitutive of the religions themselves, this common ground strategy could conceivably promote a greater convergence between the religions through contributing to the discursive imagination of common features shared by them. This will not solve the problem of religious disagreement, for it would simply introduce another religious voice seeking to authoritatively define the character of each tradition, and hence it would have to compete with more conservative voices. Chapter 5 will argue that it was just such a security-driven search for a common ground that was partially responsible historically for the imagination of religion as a genus. The incoherence of the contemporary discourse of religion as a genus prompts the question of how religion came to be thought of in this way, and it will be argued that a concern for security provides part of the answer. The problems with the contemporary conceptualisation of religion outlined in this chapter are, to some extent, a function of the fact that the notion of religion as a genus derives not from a discovery of objective similarities between Christianity and other faiths, but from a war-weary seventeenth century hope that a lowest common denominator could be found to unite rival confessions. The remainder of this chapter, however, examines how the concept is treated by scholars who have sought to explore the relationship between religion and international politics. The next section (II) treats of denotative definitions which simply specify what should be included in the category, while the following section (III) critiques connotative definitions that stipulate the uniquely shared attributes that indicate the religiousness of a thing.

3.2 Denoting Religion

There are two different senses in which we might agree on the meaning of 'religion': denotative and connotative.¹⁸ The first is what 'religion' means in a referential sense – the question here is 'to what phenomena is the term 'religion' applicable?' This sense of 'meaning' has traditionally been called the extensional or denotative meaning of a term. 'Religion' denotes the objects to which it might correctly be applied, and the collection or class of these objects constitutes the extension or denotation of the term. In the case of 'religion', the extension of the term might be 'the religions', or it might denote activities, beliefs or experiences to which the adjective 'religious' can properly be applied. In practical terms then, the denotation of religion will provide a guide as to which traditions

¹⁸ On the distinction between denotation and connotation, see Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, pp. 154-158.

or phenomena count as 'the religions' that scholars might study – whether one should include Confucianism, Shinto, nationalism or Marxism, for example. It will also establish where the boundaries of 'religion' lie in particular contexts – whether a particular exchange is economic or religious, or whether the wearing of a headscarf is a religious or cultural tradition.

This is not the only sense in which religion can be said to 'mean' something. To establish the meaning of a term is to decide on its correct application, but this may not necessarily take the form of deciding in advance all of the objects of which it can correctly be applied. It may also involve specifying some criteria for deciding whether any given object falls within the extension of that term. All objects that fall within the extension of a term such as 'religion' will have a common set of specific attributes uniquely shared, which are used to denote them. These represent the intension or connotation of a term. In addition to its extensional or denotative meaning then, a general term has an intensional or connotative meaning. The question here is 'which attributes are peculiar to religion?'¹⁹

We can therefore talk about the meaning of religion in two different senses, and in this way we can speak about two different strategies for providing a definition of religion. A connotative definition would attempt to specify the common attributes shared by all that is 'religion'. A simpler strategy is to employ a denotative approach, which is to give examples of objects that are conventionally denoted by it. I say 'conventionally', because definitions of religion are never wholly novel, but tend to begin, at least, with either clarifications or modifications of established usage. Clarke and Byrne point out that ordinary usage provides some guidance in constructing a definition, because 'No one who defines 'religion' for the purposes of the study of religion believes himself to be producing a stipulative definition of entirely new coinage. He is making more precise and clear a word with an established sense'.²⁰ This established meaning can be denotative, and it has been argued that conventional denotation of religion is foundational for any definition. In a much-cited contribution to the literature on the concept, anthropologist Melford Spiro made the point that one always begins with some implicit or explicit idea

¹⁹ Copi indicates that this is the narrow sense of connotation used by logicians. Ibid., p. 155. It can of course also refer to the total significance of a word, including its associative meanings. See Stuart Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding', in Stuart Hall, et al. (eds.), *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), pp. 132-133.

²⁰ Clarke and Byrne, *Religion Defined and Explained*, p. 5.

of what counts as religion, and this is (rightly, in his view) guided by a 'criterion of intra-cultural intuitivity' – in other words, an inherited sense of what counts as religion.²¹

Spiro made this point by criticising the opinion of both Émile Durkheim and fellow anthropologist E.E. Evans-Pritchard that definition could take place after the empirical data had been identified and gathered. Evans-Pritchard contended that 'one must not ask "what is religion?" but what are the main features of, let us say, the religion of one Melanesian people' which should then be compared with the findings about the religion of other Melanesian peoples in order to produce generalisations about Melanesian religion.²² Similarly, Durkheim insisted that students of religion should cast aside any inherited or habitual prejudices about the subject. 'Leaving aside any conception of religion in general', he exhorted, 'let us consider religions in their concrete reality, and let us try to discover what they have in common; for religion can be defined only as a function of features found wherever there is religion'.²³ Spiro's astute response to this was to point out that without some preconceived ideas about what 'religion' is, Evans-Pritchard would have no idea which aspects of life in a given Melanesian society are religious and Durkheim would be unable to identify any 'concrete realities' to consider.²⁴

Spiro's point is well taken. The study of religion in international politics presupposes some prior idea of what religion is, even if this is implicit. These preconceptions draw on a prior understanding of the set of things that are conventionally denoted as 'the religions', even if no explicit connotative definition is employed. But might it be the case that our inherited intuitions (or prejudices) about religion as a category might not stand up to sustained scrutiny? There is no reason to suppose that 'intra-cultural' intuitions will necessarily yield a coherent category, as it may equally be the case that the inherited concept is a bundle of ill-informed preconceptions and misinterpretations of other cultures. For this reason, it is important to think carefully about taken-for-granted concepts such as religion that are so influential in our classification of the world.

²¹ Melford E. Spiro, 'Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation', in Michael Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London: Tavistock, 1966), pp. 91-92.

²² E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Institutions of Primitive Society* (1954), quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 91.

²³ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 26.

²⁴ Spiro, 'Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation', pp. 91-92. A very similar critique of other authors is found in Jack Goody, 'Religion and Ritual: The Definitional Problem', *The British Journal of Sociology* vol. 12, no. 2 (1961), p. 142.

It seems to be confusion over the distinction between denotative and connotative definitional strategies that lies behind the ambiguity in Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler's treatment of the concept. Fox and Sandler adopt in practice a denotative definition of what religion is, and criticise connotative definitions for venturing into contentious territory irrelevant to the problem of understanding the role of religion in politics. Their approach remains consistent, but they do not seem able to decide whether this is avoiding the question of definition, or offering a type of definition suitable for social scientific research.

For example, in their book *Bringing Religion into International Relations*,²⁵ they represent this strategy as one of avoiding definition. They begin by noting the difficulties scholars have faced when trying to define what is meant by religion. Referring to Brian Turner's citation of 'over a dozen different and contradictory definitions and perspectives on this topic' in the social science literature, they conclude that 'a definitive definition is not realistic'.²⁶ There is a solution, however, by which the issue of religion can be made manageable for students of international politics:

The key is to focus not on what religion is, but what it does. That is, rather than addressing the more philosophical issues involved in defining religion, it is easier to stress what role religion plays in society. This has the advantage of avoiding difficult philosophical and existential issues while focusing on the core issue of the social sciences, human behavior.²⁷

They comment earlier in the book that 'our approach to the concept of religion does not rely on a specific definition of the concept. Rather, we accept that it exists and influences human behaviour and focus our efforts on discovering these influences'.²⁸ One can seemingly leave to the philosophers and theologians the irresolvable 'existential issues that are not really relevant to social scientists trying to examine the impact of religion on society'.²⁹

A year later, they edited a special issue of the journal *Terrorism and Political Violence*, focused on religion and world politics. Religion was a central concept for the issue, as the collection has two declared aims. The first is to ask 'how does religion in its various

²⁵ Fox and Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Relations*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

forms and manifestations influence world politics?' The second is to explore 'how will adding religion to the discourse on international religions modify our theoretical understanding of international relations?'³⁰ In their introduction, rather than avoiding a specific definition of the concept, they criticise the 'I may not be able to define religion but I know it when I see it' approach, insisting on the importance of more precise definitions if scholars are to be clear about what it is they are studying (see above).³¹ What they mean by this is basically the same as what they meant in their book, though:

For practical purposes it is best to avoid theological definitions of religion which focus on the nature of deities. Rather our concern is with how religion can influence human behavior and society. As explaining human behaviour and the nature of society is the goal of social scientists, this approach has the advantage of focusing on the issues relevant in this context and avoiding contentious issues peripheral to the topic at hand.³²

It appears that what Fox and Sandler are trying to avoid is the endless controversy that surrounds connotative definitions, which they refer to as 'specific' or 'theological' definitions. The alternative approach they advocate involves specifying five 'facets of religion' that are significant in influencing society: religion is a basis for identity, it provides beliefs that influence behaviour, it supplies doctrines or theologies that serve as a reservoir of justifications for different actions, it acts as a source of legitimacy, and it exercises influence through institutions.³³

In fleeing from explicit definitions, they are far from escaping the problems they perceive; they are merely taking refuge in an implicit rather than an explicit judgement of what religion is.³⁴ They do not succeed in avoiding contentious judgements about the character of religion. For example, their distinction between what religion is and what religion does involves a separation between the non-material, unknowable and contentious identity of religion itself, and the material effects of religion in the real world that can be known and agreed upon. It is notable that observable actions do not count as religion here, which is by implication an interior matter. Despite their attempts to eschew

³⁰ Fox and Sandler, 'The Question of Religion and World Politics', p. 293.

³¹ Ibid., p. 294.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., pp. 294-295. They note only four in their earlier work, combining belief and doctrine under the category of 'worldview'. Fox and Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Relations*, p. 176.

³⁴ A paraphrase of Jack Goody's criticism of Jane Harrison. Goody, 'Religion and Ritual: The Definitional Problem', p. 142.

controversy, there are already two highly contestable assumptions here about religion and the possibility of knowledge about it. Furthermore, in the next chapter it will be noted that this distinction is characteristic of Lockean liberal empiricism that serves to exclude religion from politics. Already then, the approach to religion advocated by Fox and Sandler is implicated in politics about the true identity of religion, and also contributes to sustaining a liberal conception of its relationship to politics.

In addition, they must still make contentious judgements about what counts as religion before they can make any claims about the role it plays in society. Refusing connotation, they define religion in the way that Melford Spiro identified as the beginning of all definitions of religion: with an implicit notion of its denotation. They clearly consider some phenomena religious and others to be non-religious, and have some idea what counts as religion. If they did not, how would they be able to specify in advance the ways in which religion influences society? It seems then that they work from an implicit denotative definition of religion, on the basis of which they have theorised five different politically significant ways in which religion is manifested. The denotative definition that could be abstracted from their book would look something like this: beliefs, doctrines, identities and institutions related to Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism.

Fox and Sandler are far from alone in this regard. The assumption that religion can be defined denotatively seems widespread. Relatively few studies on religion in international politics explicitly specify what is being meant by religion in connotative terms, justifying the treatment of particular traditions as instances of a generic phenomenon by specifying what attributes they share. Some see the need to clarify what they mean by related terms, but do not address religion itself. For example, in the chapters Ken Dark wrote for his edited volume *Religion and International Relations*, he explains that 'In my contributions to this book, the term 'religious community' refers to a group of people who can be identified as belonging to a specific religion'.³⁵ Susanna Pearce clarifies what makes a conflict religious in these terms: 'A religious conflict could be one in which the primary issue between the parties is a religious issue (issue-oriented definition) or a religious conflict could be one in which the two parties have differing religious identities (identity-oriented definition)'.³⁶ Mark Juergensmeyer is careful to

³⁵ Ken R. Dark, 'Large-Scale Religious Change and World Politics', in Ken R. Dark (ed.), *Religion and International Relations* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 75 n.71. See also Ken R. Dark, 'The Political Consequences of Large-Scale Religious Change in China and the Asia-Pacific Region', in Ken R. Dark (ed.), *Religion and International Relations* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

³⁶ Pearce, 'Religious Rage: A Quantitative Analysis of the Intensity of Religious Conflicts', p. 340.

define state, nation, nationalism and nation-state as key terms for his study of religious nationalism, but does not clarify how he is using 'religion'.³⁷ His more recent book on the phenomenon of religious violence does not provide any discussion of what makes violence religious, even though the notion of 'terrorism' is problematised as being dependent on one's worldview.³⁸

None of these authors specify what is meant by 'religion', beyond implicitly denoting certain traditions as 'religious'. One could refer to numerous other instances in which despite being a concept central to the study, religion is omitted from the terms whose intension is defined. Some works look at the role played by a number of different traditions and attempt to generalise from this concerning the difference made by religion,³⁹ or advocate the return of religion to political life.⁴⁰ Others focus on one tradition and treat it as an instance of the more general phenomenon, suggesting that the study can serve as a contribution to a more general understanding of the dynamics of religion in world politics.⁴¹ A third body of work looks at a particular tradition, using the concept habitually and casually, even where it does not play a strong role in the analysis or the conclusions drawn.⁴² The concept may play a different role in each of these types of study, and all of them define religion (at least implicitly) in terms of its extension, and yet none of them establishes the specific attributes that make the religions religious.

There are two problems with the strategy of defining religion by simply pointing to some examples of the phenomena. First of all, why include these phenomena and no

³⁷ Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*, p. 6.

³⁸ Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*.

³⁹ In addition to Pearce, 'Religious Rage: A Quantitative Analysis of the Intensity of Religious Conflicts', see Yehudith Auerbach, 'Forgiveness and Reconciliation: The Religious Dimension', *Terrorism and Political Violence* vol. 17, no. 3 (2005); Hasenclever and Rittberger, 'Does Religion Make a Difference? Theoretical Approaches to the Impact of Faith on Political Conflict'; Hoffman, "'Holy Terror': The Implications of a Terrorism Motivated by Religion'; Cecelia Lynch, 'Dogma, Praxis and Religious Perspectives on Multiculturalism', in Pavlos Hatzopoulos and Fabio Petito (eds.), *Religion in International Relations: The Return From Exile* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Elizabeth A. Oldmixon, Beth Rosenson, and Kenneth D. Wald, 'Conflict over Israel: The Role of Religion, Race, Party and Ideology in the U.S. House of Representatives', *Terrorism and Political Violence* vol. 17, no. 3 (2005); Ranstorp, 'Terrorism in the Name of Religion'; Rapoport, 'Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions'; Jeffrey R. Seal, 'Ours is the Way of God': Religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict', *Journal of Peace Research* vol. 36, no. 5 (1999).

⁴⁰ Falk, 'A Worldwide Religious Resurgence in an Era of Globalisation and Apocalyptic Terrorism'.

⁴¹ See for example Gauvav Ghose and Patrick James, 'Third-Party Intervention in Ethno-Religious Conflict: Role Theory, Pakistan, and War in Kashmir, 1965', *Terrorism and Political Violence* vol. 17, no. 3 (2005); Harriet A. Harris, 'Theological Reflections on Religious Resurgence and International Stability: a Look at Protestant Evangelicalism', in Ken R. Dark (ed.), *Religion and International Relations* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); Jonathan Rynhold, 'Religion, Postmodernization, and Israeli Approaches to the Conflict with the Palestinians', *Terrorism and Political Violence* vol. 17, no. 3 (2005).

⁴² Examples of this include Hillel Frisch, 'Has the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Become Islamic? Fatah, Islam, and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades', *Terrorism and Political Violence* vol. 17, no. 3 (2005); Peter Palmer, 'Churches and Conflict in Former Yugoslavia', in Ken R. Dark (ed.), *Religion and International Relations* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); C. Ram-Prasad, 'Hindu Nationalism and the International Relations of India', in Ken R. Dark (ed.), *Religion and International Relations* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

others? If the extension of religion was stable and uncontested, a denotative definition might be more viable, and yet this does not seem to be the case. Indeed, the extension of religion is so controversial that Melford Spiro felt compelled to comment that

An examination of the endemic definitional controversies concerning religion leads to the conclusion that they are not so much controversies over the meaning of the term 'religion' or of the concept which it expresses, as they are jurisdictional disputes over the phenomenon or range of phenomena which are considered to constitute legitimately the empirical referent of the term.⁴³

If Spiro is correct, then the strategy of eschewing connotative for denotative definitions only obscures rather than escapes the problem, because it is dispute over what is denoted by the term that is at the root of controversy over its connotations. Whether or not one agrees with Spiro's analysis of the definitional debate, it can be noted that the extension of religion is by no means clear and unproblematic.

Let us consider first the denotation of religion in the international politics literature – the things of which the term is used. One finds it used most often to refer to the usual suspects: Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism. Beyond these 'world religions', one also sometimes finds other traditions sometimes included in the category of world religions: Chinese Religion (Confucianism, Taoism, traditional Chinese religion)⁴⁴ and Japanese Religion (Shinto, traditional Japanese religion). One also encounters references to Falun Gong, atheism, Jainism, shamanism, doomsday cults such as Heaven's Gate and Aum Shinrikyo and New Age spirituality.⁴⁵ Some have treated nationalism as a form of political religion.⁴⁶ There are a number of difficult cases here though. Many atheists would contest the charge that they are religious. Some scholars of international politics treat nationalism and religion as fundamentally different phenomena, even if there are convergences between them.⁴⁷ There has also traditionally been some doubt as to whether Confucianism is a religion or an ethical system, and it has been acknowledged that Shinto is similarly contested.⁴⁸

⁴³ Spiro, 'Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation', p. 87.

⁴⁴ Haynes, *Introduction to International Relations and Religion*, pp. 398-408. treats Confucianism as a religion.

⁴⁵ Falk, 'A Worldwide Religious Resurgence in an Era of Globalisation and Apocalyptic Terrorism', p. 191.

⁴⁶ Anthony D. Smith, 'The "Sacred" Dimension of Nationalism', *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* vol. 29, no. 3 (2000).

⁴⁷ Fox and Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Relations*, pp. 3-5, 170-171.

⁴⁸ Ken Dark points to doubts about Confucianism and Shintoism. Dark, 'The Political Consequences of Large-Scale Religious Change in China and the Asia-Pacific Region', p. 199.

Beyond international politics, though, the denotation of religion becomes even more indistinct. Scholars have questioned whether voodoo is religion or magic.⁴⁹ Walter Benjamin suggested that capitalism can be understood in terms of religion,⁵⁰ and there has been much speculation about whether Marxism or Maoism should be classed as religions.⁵¹ Stanley Fish has described liberalism as 'the religion of letting it all hang out'.⁵² Sport has frequently been cited as possessing remarkable affinities with religion,⁵³ and some have remarked that the orientation towards science by certain individuals and groups often displays in rudimentary form features that can be considered characteristic of religion.⁵⁴ The question of where religion ends and non-religion begins at the boundaries of particular traditions are similarly disputed; it was noted in the last chapter that this question lies at the heart of political controversy over secularisation. Melford Spiro reports 'interminable (and fruitless) controversies' in anthropology over the religious status of coercive rituals and ethical codes.⁵⁵ One would expect religious studies specialists to have a more focused idea of their subject matter, but Timothy Fitzgerald observes that

one finds in the published work of scholars working within religion departments the term "religion" being used to refer to such diverse institutions as totems, the principle of hierarchy, Christmas cakes, witchcraft, unconditioned reality, the rights of man, the National Essence, Marxism and Freudianism, the tea ceremony, nature, ethics, and so on.⁵⁶

It seems that what counts as religion is not nearly so straightforward as one might think. The issue is not solved by focusing on the 'world religions', because that category is similarly contested. Most contemporary lists specify at least Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism and Buddhism as comprising the extension of the class. Some lists also

⁴⁹ Peter Byrne, 'Religion and the Religions', in Peter Clarke and Stewart Sutherland (eds.), *The Study of Religion, Traditional and New Religion* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 5.

⁵⁰ Walter Benjamin, 'Capitalism as Religion', in Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (eds.), *Selected Writings* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

⁵¹ Byrne, 'Religion and the Religions', p. 5; Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marxism and Christianity* (London: Duckworth, 1968); J. Milton Yinger, *The Scientific Study of Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 11.

⁵² Stanley Fish, 'Our Faith in Letting It All Hang Out', *New York Times*, 12 February 2006. For an interesting discussion of Fish's article, see Warner, 'Is Liberalism a Religion?'

⁵³ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, trans. Simon Lee (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), pp. 53-57.

⁵⁴ Yinger, *The Scientific Study of Religion*, pp. 11-12.

⁵⁵ Spiro, 'Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation', p. 87.

⁵⁶ Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, p. 17.

include Judaism and Japanese religion, though, and the earliest lists contained only Christianity, Islam and Buddhism.⁵⁷

Fox and Sandler do recognise the problem involved in this approach, writing that 'while helpful, this framework for understanding religion and others like it are still lacking in that they do not solve one central problem: where do we draw the line between what is religion and what is not? For instance, what is religion and what is culture?'⁵⁸ Because they refuse to countenance connotative definitions as raising 'theological' or 'existential' questions outside the purview of social science, they end up implicitly endorsing the position they explicitly reject: that of 'I don't know what religion is but I know it when I see it'. And yet if those working on religion in global politics wish to continue to treat 'religion' as a general category and yet exclude nationalism, capitalism and Christmas cakes from their analysis, they must say why. In this case, one would have to turn to a connotative definition to establish more precisely the intension of the class.

An intensional definition is recommended also by the second problem that weakens denotative definitions. Because none of the studies that rely on denotation alone explain what it is that 'the religions' they name have in common, they provide no rationale for treating all these different phenomena together as instances of a single phenomenon. The problem is most pronounced where the aim is explicitly to provide generalisations concerning the role of religion in international politics through taking examples from a number of different traditions. It also occurs where the focus on one tradition is understood to be a contribution to the wider project of understanding the role of religion in international politics.

Take, for example, the articles in the 2005 special issue of *Terrorism and Political Violence*, many of which focus on particular traditions. Despite their particular foci, Fox and Sandler make a point of emphasising the common thread uniting them: 'we would like to emphasize that all of these contributions develop theoretical models and have practical findings that are applicable beyond the specific cases which are their focus'.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ This categorisation is itself problematic, as Jonathan Z. Smith explains. It derives from a nineteenth century division between 'universal' religions (originally only Christianity, Buddhism and Islam) and 'national' or 'ethnic' religions (everything else). Over time, the three became seven through a process for which Smith can find no explicit rationalisation beyond what he describes as a curious 'pluralistic etiquette'. The inclusion of Islam made it rude to exclude Judaism, originally the paradigmatic example of an ethnic religion. Likewise, once Buddhism was included, it was felt that Hinduism, Chinese religions and Japanese religions ought to be included too. Smith comments that 'the unprincipled nature of this list is made plain by the fact that some scholars list only five, omitting Judaism and Japanese religions, while no typology includes Manichaeism, perhaps the first, self-conscious "world religion"'. Smith, 'A Matter of Class: Taxonomies of Religion', p. 396.

⁵⁸ Fox and Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Relations*, p. 177.

⁵⁹ Fox and Sandler, 'The Question of Religion and World Politics', p. 294.

Stuart Cohen's interesting study on the evolution of Jewish discourse on the resort to war is one example of this in the issue. He acknowledges that his subject matter may appear of limited relevance in other contexts, for it focuses on a particular set of religious beliefs in a unique cultural and political context.⁶⁰ Yet in the conclusion he suggests that there may be a broader application for his findings, proposing that 'How traditional Jewish teachings are today influencing Israeli troop behavior on the modern (and postmodern) battlefields can in fact serve as a case study of the degrees to which religion can altogether fulfil the functions of both a motivating factor and a legitimizing referent in situations of contemporary international conflict'.⁶¹ Cohen does not provide any justification for the assumption that Judaism is a species of a common genus that can be meaningfully differentiated from other human institutions. It is only by a connotative definition of religion that such an assumption can be defended.

The problem is less intense where generalisations about 'religion' are not the primary concern, but this work nevertheless implicitly trades on the assumption that there is something distinctive picked out by the signifier. The mere fact of borderline cases suggests that the assumption that religion is a genus requires further reflection, and this involves engaging with the controversies that surround connotative definitions. Before I look in more detail at specific connotative strategies that have been employed in international politics, it is worth considering the general issues involved in specifying the intension of religion, and particularly the most common form of connotation: definition by genus and species.

3.3 Religion as Belief, Morality and Aesthetic Experience

To describe religion as *sui generis* – a phenomenon distinct from other human cultural productions – implies that it is possible to say *how* it differs. A connotative definition provides a more stable justification for including some phenomena and excluding others. Definition by connotation establishes the intension of religion by picking out a characteristic or set of characteristics that a phenomenon must display is it to be considered a member of the class – for example, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all religions because they share X,Y and Z. Daniel Philpott, commenting on the ambiguous denotation of religion, identifies the need for a connotative definition when he writes

⁶⁰ Stuart A. Cohen, 'The Changing Jewish Discourse on Armed Conflict: Themes and Implications', *Terrorism and Political Violence* vol. 17, no. 3 (2005), p. 366.

⁶¹ Ibid.

that 'The difficulty then becomes that of finding one that includes Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, and other instances of what scholars mean by world religions but that excludes what they usually do not mean – Marxism, Nazism, nationalism, and witchcraft, all of which, after all, have also inspired feverish belief, ritual and devotion'.⁶² A successful definition, within the terms of the modern discourse of religion, is one that can identify what is common to everything that is conventionally thought of as religion, whilst allowing for a meaningful separation from what is usually considered non-religious.

The most common type of connotative strategy is definition by genus and species, and this is indeed the strategy adopted by many definitions of religion in other disciplines.⁶³ As Eric Sharpe commented some years ago, 'Religion...has come to denote more or less the *genus* of which the various individual religions are considered to be *species*. In one sense, it is an abstract noun; in another, it is a collective noun'.⁶⁴ Genus and species are relative terms here, like 'parent' and 'offspring'. Just as the same person may be a parent in relation to their own children and offspring in relation to their own parents, so a particular class can be at once a genus in relation to its own subclasses and a subclass of some higher genus. It is in this way that religion is often taken to be a genus of which the religions are species, and a subordinate taxon of some higher class.

Sustained reflection on religion as an object of study began with the Enlightenment, whose thinkers approached religion through a tri-partite taxonomic classification of human nature. Within this paradigm, three main faculties or attributes could be identified in human beings: reason, will, and emotion or sensation. Reason enabled one to know, will is the location of the capacity to make moral choices and act, and emotion or sensation is the site of feeling.⁶⁵ Enlightenment debates about religion revolved around which human faculty it was most closely related to: the theoretical capacity concerned with truth, the practical capacity pertaining to moral or ethical considerations, or the sensory capacity associated with a perception or judgment of beauty.⁶⁶ It was assumed on this basis that religion was a matter of truth, goodness or beauty, and therefore that either philosophy, ethics or aesthetics constituted the

⁶² Philpott, 'The Challenge of September 11 to Secularism in International Relations', p. 68.

⁶³ On the genus and species model of definition, see Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, pp. 162-169; Yagisawa, 'Definition', p. 214. For discussions of this point specifically in relation to religion, see Frederick Ferré, 'The Definition of Religion', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* vol. 38 (1970), pp. 8-9; Penner and Yonan, 'Is a Science of Religion Possible?' pp. 128-130.

⁶⁴ Eric J. Sharpe, *Understanding Religion* (London: Duckworth, 1983), p. 46.

⁶⁵ Fred Dallmayr, 'A Global Spiritual Resurgence? On Christian and Islamic Spiritualities', in Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopoulos (eds.), *Religion in International Relations: The Return From Exile* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 212.

⁶⁶ Walter H. Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 8-10.

appropriate frame of reference for understanding religion – perhaps all of them, or at least some combination of them.

When religion was conceived as primarily theoretical, it was the beliefs, myths and doctrines that were its significant features. One of the earliest attempts to specify in detail what was common to ‘the religions’ was made by Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, who identified five ‘undeniable propositions’ shared by all the religions of the world ‘amongst those Heaps of Ethnical Superstitions’.⁶⁷ The nineteenth century anthropologist E.B. Tylor continued in this vein, defining religion as ‘belief in Spiritual Beings’.⁶⁸

When the practical dimension was to the fore, religion was equated primarily with morality, rites or prayers. Perhaps the best known equation of religion with morality is Immanuel Kant’s *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.⁶⁹ The ‘reason’ that Kant believed religion belonged to most properly was not theoretical reason but practical reason, and therefore ‘Our commitment to a religious, that is providential, outlook is not something which we derive from reasoning about the course of natural events but is the result of a projection, licensed by the demands of practical rationality, of our moral natures onto the world’.⁷⁰ Religion, for Kant, was hence ‘the recognition of all our duties as divine commands’.⁷¹ The religion-as-morality paradigm became an important feature of the nineteenth-century liberal Protestantism espoused by figures such as Albrecht Ritschl,⁷² and echoes of it can be heard in Tony Blair’s focus on practical ethical actions as being at the core of religious life.⁷³

The experiential paradigm conceived religion as a matter of emotions, sentiments or visions, in relation to which all else is secondary. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) is generally considered the first to define religion in terms of feeling and intuition, rather

⁶⁷ Edward Herbert, *The Antient Religion of the Gentiles, and Causes of their Errors Consider'd*, trans. William Lewis (London: John Nutt, 1705), p. 3.

⁶⁸ E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom* (1889), quoted in Wilson, ‘From the Lexical to the Polythetic: A Brief History of the Definition of Religion’, p. 145.

⁶⁹ Immanuel Kant, ‘Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason’, in Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (eds.), *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁷⁰ Peter Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 129.

⁷¹ Kant, ‘Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason’, p. 177.

⁷² See the discussion in Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline*, pp. 18-20.

⁷³ For a contemporary version of the religion-as-morality approach, see Byrne’s Kantian proposal Peter Byrne, ‘The Definition of Religion: Squaring the Circle’, in Jan G. Platvoet and Arie L. Moedijk (eds.), *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

than thought and action.⁷⁴ He rejected interpretations of religion as right knowledge or right action, arguing that intellectual cognition and systems of morality were no more than secondary expressions of religion. This clearly located it within the individual at a non-social level, in a zone of experience prior to philosophy or reason.⁷⁵ Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) was writing in this tradition when he denied that religion was first and foremost a rational affair, defining it instead as the individual's unique experience of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* – the encounter with an ineffable numinous realm that exceeds the grasp of human reason, inspiring overpowering experiences of awe.⁷⁶ Friedrich Kratochwil explored this perspective on religion, drawing directly on Otto.⁷⁷

A conflict of faculties

Emphasising one of these 'faculties' as primary is bound up with a politics *about* religion, because they determine the kind of legitimate public contributions religion can make in society. In the last chapter I recorded a complaint by the theologian Nicholas Lash that religion in modern societies could be about the beautiful, sometimes about the good, but rarely about the true. In a culture where aesthetics is a matter of subjective personal preference rather than objective beauty, describing faith as fundamentally aesthetic or experiential encourages the view that religion is a matter of individual taste or 'lifestyle'. Statements made from what is labelled a religious standpoint can only be about a limited range of subjects, religious truth claims must be measured against the canons of scientific rationality as the new arbiter of truth, and the legitimacy of public religious reflections on ethics is highly contested. As recent debates over abortion, euthanasia, stem-cell research and human cloning demonstrated, religious reflection on the norms that should govern expanding scientific ability to modify and manipulate human life has seemed to some to represent an imposition of subjective religious preferences in areas that should either be entirely a matter of personal choice or subject to the decisions of specialists in the subfield of bio-ethics.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter, 2nd ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). See also Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline*, pp. 13-18.

⁷⁵ For the intellectual background to these ideas, see Ward, *True Religion*, pp. 73-97.

⁷⁶ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey, 2nd ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950).

⁷⁷ Kratochwil, 'Religion and (Inter-)National Politics: On the Heuristics of Identities, Structures, and Agents'.

⁷⁸ A.C. Grayling, 'The Curse of Religion', *Guardian* 2009.

When one faculty is emphasised over the others, traditions which emphasise the importance of other dimensions are more easily represented as deviant. It will be argued in the next chapter that liberal political thinkers such as Locke tended to represent belief as the heart of religion, and on this basis posited outward actions as non-essential, secondary to the intellectual core of faith. This meant not only that the rituals of traditions such as Roman Catholicism could be denounced as ‘priestcraft’ – impositions designed by the clergy to ‘multiply their advantages’⁷⁹ – but also that outward actions could be subject to regulation by the state with no threat to tolerance and religious freedom.

On the political dimension of defining the kind of thing religion is, consider also the following statement by Oliver McTernan, in which he argues that the experiential dimension represents the essence of religion. It occurs in the context of an argument that the only adequate response to the problem of religious violence is for religious leaders to encourage the ‘exclusivists’ within their traditions to become ‘pluralists’, accepting that there is ‘more than one way to understand the sacred’ and that ‘no single tradition is capable of comprehending the truth alone’.⁸⁰ McTernan writes that religious peace is dependent upon recognising the fundamentally experiential purpose of religious belief and practice:

Pluralism is a threat to those whose faith has never matured beyond the cultural or cultic levels. Cultural religion thrives behind the high fences as it depends upon the words of the creed, the actions of the cult, and the sense of belonging to community to shape the identity its adherents. None of these aspects of religion should be seen as an end in themselves. The prime purpose of religious dogmas, worship, laws and community is to enable people to discover the transcendent nearness – the divine presence – in the midst of human experience. They are props, as it were, meant to point the way or sharpen our awareness of the transcendent in our lives.⁸¹

Specific beliefs and practices are represented here by McTernan as secondary elements in relation to the common experiential core of all religions in a scheme which provides the

⁷⁹ The phrase was turned by the seventeenth century deist Charles Blount. Harrison, *"Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*, p. 73.

⁸⁰ McTernan, *Violence in God's Name: Religion in an Age of Conflict*, p. 161.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 162.

basis for a new hierarchy between good pluralists and bad exclusivists.⁸² Exclusivists who insist on the particular doctrinal and ritual forms and communal practices of their own traditions are beholden to an immature, 'cultic' faith that must be outgrown. They are represented as sectarian defenders of 'their own faith enclaves' who are worsening 'a crisis that could threaten the very survival of humanity'.⁸³

There are serious problems with this standpoint. The rhetoric of non-missionary openness, mature tolerance and respect for difference versus primitive, cultic attachment to exclusive local traditions masks the exclusivity of McTernan's own perspective. In order to secure the priority of the experiential mystical dimension of faith that is beyond all particular ritual and belief, he must assert his own account of the prime purpose of religious dogma, law and community against competing accounts, thus falling back into the exclusivism he is so critical of. The point here is not that McTernan's description of the nature and purpose of 'religion' can be replaced with a less ideological account, but that the failure to acknowledge the confessional, particular status of any such scheme, including his own, forecloses the possibility of any genuine conversation by denigrating potential dialogue partners as dangerously sectarian. 'Exclusivists' can only appear as problems, intransigent elements who 'need to be enlightened, encouraged and supported upon the path to becoming "pluralists"' by the leaders of their respective traditions.⁸⁴ Behind the tolerant call for 'dialogue' is a demand for the reform of religious subjectivities not amenable to this kind of inter-cultural engagement, which then takes place between representatives of religious traditions who have solved *in advance* the substantive problem of how they engage with each other. One wonders what would be left to talk about, for that which distinguishes the various religious traditions from each other has been relegated to secondary status in a way that does not really take the particular claims of others seriously.

Different conceptions of the type of human faculty religion is most fundamentally related to are thus implicated in a politics over the correct response to religious violence that is itself inseparable from a politics over what constitutes a legitimate expression of religion. Furthermore, it is highly questionable whether the practical, experiential and theoretical elements can be separated from each other. George

⁸² In a similar vein Charles Kimball approvingly cites the argument that religious violence is only possible because those who slaughter each other are unable to 'see beyond their particular metaphors and "names" for the same God'. The particular beliefs and narratives of a community are here taken to be secondary reflections on the same divine reality. Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, p. 32.

⁸³ McTernan, *Violence in God's Name: Religion in an Age of Conflict*, pp. 161-162.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

Lindbeck has argued that a religious experience can only acquire meaning within the particular speculative narratives of a tradition which 'make sense' of it.⁸⁵ Talal Asad has similarly criticised the view that it is orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy, ritual rather than doctrine, that matters in Islam on the grounds that the correct model to which rituals and ethical practices must conform are always conveyed in authoritative formulas.⁸⁶ Ethical practices are always taught and authorised by reasoning over their point and proper performance, and this applies to any tradition. The ritual and experiential elements of traditions cannot be separated from the theoretical. A further implication of this is that attempts to unite the religions around certain common ethical precepts will not solve the problem of different tradition-specific interpretations of those principles – a point that will be discussed further in chapter 5.

These latter difficulties have to some degree been mitigated in conceptions of religion that do not assume that religion belongs principally to a single dimension of human life. Other options that have been proposed for the overarching class include the human activity of valuing,⁸⁷ human institutions⁸⁸ and 'cultural meaning systems'.⁸⁹ Religion might also be a 'macro-entity' displaying various features belonging to a number of different classes, such as discourse, practice, community and institutions.⁹⁰ In international politics, religion has been treated variously as a species of discourse,⁹¹ 'a system of beliefs and practices',⁹² and 'a type of social tradition' consisting of a set of communally embodied practices, reflected on theoretically.⁹³

Nevertheless, these more general approaches run up against a further obstacle, in that for the category of religion to be meaningfully different from other domains of social practice there must be some means of differentiating it from non-religious instances of the human capacities, faculties or institutions of which it is said to be an

⁸⁵ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), p. 34.

⁸⁶ Asad, 'The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam'.

⁸⁷ Ferré, 'The Definition of Religion'.

⁸⁸ Byrne, 'Religion and the Religions', p. 7; Spiro, 'Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation'.

⁸⁹ Clifford Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System', *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (London: Fontana Press, 1993). In international politics, see Israella Silberman, 'Religion as a Meaning System: Implications for the New Millennium', *Journal of Social Issues* vol. 61, no. 4 (2005); Israella Silberman, E. Tory Higgins, and Carol S. Dweck, 'Religion and World Change: Violence and Terrorism versus Peace', *Journal of Social Issues* vol. 61, no. 4 (2005).

⁹⁰ This is Bruce Lincoln's proposal: Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11*, pp. 5-8.

⁹¹ Laustsen and Wæver, 'In Defence of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization'.

⁹² Haynes, *Introduction to International Relations and Religion*, p. 11. See also Haynes, 'Religion in International Relations: What are the issues?' pp. 455-456; Jeffrey Haynes, 'Religion and International Relations in the 21st Century: Conflict or Co-operation', *Third World Quarterly* vol. 27, no. 3 (2006), p. 538.

⁹³ Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations*, pp. 87, 105-106. Thomas' develops an approach based on the work of Alasdair MacIntyre.

example.⁹⁴ Beliefs, moral codes, experiences and organisations are not generally denoted as uniquely religious phenomena – and they cannot be if ‘religion’ is to be treated as a special factor or variable affecting international politics according to a logic all of its own. This dovetails with the concern of the last chapter: if religious discourse cannot be said to differ in some fundamental way from political, legal, and scientific discourse, the grounds for treating it as a discrete aspect of life crumbles. It might be seen as a type of belief, morality, feeling, or more broadly a type of cultural system or human institution, but it can only be treated separately as a unique type of thing if it can be distinguished from other instances of the same phenomena by the identification of specific *differentiae*. There must be some peculiar attribute or group of attributes – a ‘specific difference’ – that distinguishes religious beliefs from political beliefs, or religious institutions from other types of human institution.

3.4 Specific Differences

Specific differences identify a particular tradition as a species of the genus ‘religion’. Borrowing a distinction from Peter Byrne, the *differentiae* can be classified according to whether they depend on specifying the object, the goal or the function of the element (or some combination of elements).⁹⁵ Theoretical, practical and experiential elements are more likely to be differentiated by reference to their object than the sociological dimension. It may be a belief in God or supernatural beings, or practices devoted to or experiences of such an object. The goal is more commonly viewed as the distinguishing feature of the practical and sociological dimensions, and to a lesser extent the theoretical dimension. It might be salvation or the achievement of some ultimate good that practices and religious organisations are uniquely oriented towards. Functional *differentia* could potentially identify any or all of the elements as religious, according to some purpose served by religious phenomena, such as providing individual lives with an overall meaning or unifying or integrating society.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Scott Thomas makes a similar point: ‘The religion-as-ideology approach needs to consider how religious ideas differ from secular political ideologies’. Scott M. Thomas, ‘Religion and International Conflict’, in Ken R. Dark (ed.), *Religion and International Relations* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 3.

⁹⁵ Byrne, ‘Religion and the Religions’, p. 7.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Sociologists have traditionally distinguished between substantive and functional definitions of religion.⁹⁷ To state the difference between them succinctly, substantive definitions are concerned with what religion *is* – for example, religion is manifested in a belief in supernatural beings or an orientation towards the sacred. Functional definitions, by contrast, are concerned with what religion *does* and how it affects the society in which it is found. For example, religion provides answers to existential questions or binds people together in a society. The definitions reviewed below are substantive – functional definitions are not considered in detail, because with only one exception (as far as I have been able to discover), they have not been used by scholars exploring the mutual impact of religion and international politics.⁹⁸ I shall speculate as to the reasons for this in the conclusion.

In summary then, a connotative definition of the genus-species variety must identify the class of phenomena to which religion essentially belongs, and the specific differences that separate it from other instances of the same class. These differentiae must be specific enough to be shared by no other instances of the overarching genus of which religion itself a species, yet general enough to identify something common to all that is included as a sub-class of religion. The problem is, it is far from clear that there are any such common features. In the next section I shall examine the most common approaches to this issue, and suggest that they can only involve universalising the categories of one tradition (usually Christianity) by ascending to such a level of generality that the concept becomes useless as an independent variable.

A common strategy for identifying the specific differences that characterise religion is analytic or descriptive definition. Analytic definitions pick out 'markers' peculiar to religion, *describing* it as religion in terms of these features. Many connotative definitions of religion in international politics can be considered analytic, and their usefulness can be evaluated in a relatively straightforward fashion, according to whether they identify common features of a broad range of phenomena, without succumbing to an infinite extension of the class. A number of possibilities have been put forward as characteristic of religion: monotheism, theism, spiritual or superhuman beings, the absolute, the ultimate, sacredness and transcendence. In each case it can be doubted whether such concepts are truly universal, and their presence must be a matter for

⁹⁷ Anthony J. Blasi, 'Definition of Religion', in William H. Swatos (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1998); Davie, *The Sociology of Religion*, pp. 19-20.

⁹⁸ The exception is Anthony D. Smith's Durkheimian analysis of nationalism as religion – which combines substantive and functionalist elements. Smith, 'The "Sacred" Dimension of Nationalism'.

empirical enquiry rather than definitional fiat. The more valid conceptions are the most general, and yet their very vagueness expands the extension of religion far beyond what is commonly referred to as religion. The history of attempts to define religion can be read as a movement towards ever greater generality, in an effort to escape the freight of Christian categories. However, this movement increases the empirical viability of the concept at the expense of its analytical usefulness.

Theism, monotheism and the supernatural

This flight from particularity can be illustrated best by considering efforts to expand the Christian notion of God into a more encompassing class. The progression began with conceptions in which monotheism was represented as common to all religions. Monotheism was then replaced by theism, which was in turn succeeded by supernatural beings as exceptions to the existing paradigm were discovered. Let us first recall Herbert of Cherbury, whose identification of features common to all the religions of the world was amongst the earliest such efforts. Herbert attempted to find a set of beliefs vague enough to be present in outwardly different religions, yet precise enough not to include everything. Herbert's proposal as to what was shared by the religions was clearly heavily indebted to Christianity. The common notions he identified were that

(I) That there is one Supreme God. (II) That he ought to be worshipped. (III) That Vertue and Piety are the chief Parts of Divine Worship. (IV) That we ought to be sorry for our Sins, and repent of them. (V) That Divine Goodness doth dispense Rewards and Punishments both in this Life, and after it.⁹⁹

His location of this common factor in monotheism and a moral awareness has remained a common way of seeking a unity in the world religions,¹⁰⁰ but it clearly does not encompass everything that is generally referred to as religion. The influx of ethnographic evidence during the nineteenth century made it clear that many of the 'primitive' peoples of the world were immersed in beliefs and practices that did not resemble the stripped down monotheism projected as universal by Herbert and the deists he influenced. One way of dealing with this problem was to widen the category, dropping from the intension

⁹⁹ Lord Herbert of Cherbury, *The Antient Religion of the Gentiles, and Causes of their Errors Consider'd*, trans. William Lewis (London: John Nutt, 1705), pp. 3-4.

¹⁰⁰ Byrne, 'Religion and the Religions', p. 15.

those attributes with 'primitive' religions did not share with Christianity, Islam and Judaism, such as monotheism, a Judeo-Christian ethical code and a belief in post-mortem judgement.¹⁰¹ Within this approach the substantive content common to religions had to be represented by a more general concept that identified religion less closely with the particulars of the Christian religion.

This was attempted in a number of ways. One strategy was to widen the notion of divinity characteristic of earlier definitions. Thus it was that E.B. Tylor's definition of religion as 'belief in Spiritual Beings' was intended to account for polytheism and tribes that had no notion of a supreme being.¹⁰² In a similar vein, Melford Spiro proposed that religion is 'an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings'.¹⁰³ Another approach has been to deploy the concept of the supernatural, as in Eric Sharpe's discussion of what criteria one might use in deciding whether a belief, action or an organism is 'religious': 'To my mind', he declared, 'the only tenable criteria is that of the firm conviction *on the believer's part* (not the observer's) of the actual existence of a supernatural, supersensory order of being, and of the actual or potential interplay, through a network of sacred symbols, of that order of being with the world in which his normal life is lived'.¹⁰⁴ The specific difference – in these cases, the object of belief, action or interaction – is expanded to include those things that our ordinary classifications define as religious.

The debate over the adequacy of these kind of definitions was initiated by Durkheim, who questioned the empirical adequacy of approaches which made either the supernatural or some conception of divinity the hallmark of religion. The supernatural, he argued, had appeared relatively recently in the history of religions and presupposed the idea of a natural, law governed order of things. The natural-supernatural distinction was of relatively recent vintage, and only made sense as constituting the realm of religion within a modern scientific worldview.¹⁰⁵ The supernatural as a realm opposed to the natural was an invention of thirteenth century theologians, and did not exist in Christian thought prior to this time.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, those who made belief in gods or spiritual beings the hallmark of religion defended a model that was confounded by 'a multitude of obviously religious facts', such as the awkward existence of the god-less

¹⁰¹ Wilson, 'From the Lexical to the Polythetic: A Brief History of the Definition of Religion', pp. 144-145.

¹⁰² Byrne, 'Religion and the Religions', p. 8.

¹⁰³ Spiro, 'Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation', p. 96.

¹⁰⁴ Sharpe, *Understanding Religion*, p. 48.

¹⁰⁵ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, pp. 26-31.

¹⁰⁶ Lorraine Daston, 'The Nature of Nature in Early Modern Europe', *Configurations* vol. 6, no. 2 (1998), pp. 154-158.

religions of Buddhism and Jainism.¹⁰⁷ Some have questioned whether Durkheim was correct in his judgement that some significant variants of Buddhism lack any notion of divinity, but the scholarly consensus is that he was substantially right.¹⁰⁸ It might be added that notions such as superhuman and supernatural are difficult, if not impossible to use in cross-cultural studies on account of cultural variations in what counts as human and natural. William Herbrechtsmeier points out that while Buddhists may claim powers and attributes for Gautama Buddha that go beyond what would be considered human in Western conceptions, such qualities are considered to be a mark of fully realised humanity rather than a transcendence of it.¹⁰⁹

The absolute, the ultimate and the sacred

Durkheim suggested that assumptions about divinity and the supernatural derived their plausibility from 'the habits of mind we owe to our religious education'.¹¹⁰ The suspicion of ethnocentrism that follows definitions positing some divinity can only be shaken off through widening the differentia still further. Scott Thomas is among the authors in IP who have followed this path. He chides those who represent religion as a species of belief without explaining how it differs from other types of belief, proposing that 'The use of religion and religious beliefs in politics is different from secular political ideologies because moral commitments and policy options derived from religious beliefs, practices, and institutions are associated with the absolute and the ultimate'.¹¹¹ This may appear more cross-culturally and trans-historically applicable, but it also shifts the problem to one of how to define 'the absolute' or 'the ultimate'. If immanent realities qualify as absolute or ultimate, it might be observed that a whole range of things are in practice treated in some sense as absolute or ultimate by human beings. On the other hand, if they are taken as referring to some kind of supernatural reality, the definition retains Judeo-Christian associations that exclude, for example, animistic traditions which do not make any reference to a non-material order.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, pp. 31-35, quote from 31.

¹⁰⁸ See Spiro, 'Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation', pp. 91-96. For a more recent critique, see Marco Orrù and Amy Wang, 'Durkheim, Religion and Buddhism', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* vol. 31, no. 1 (1992). Recent studies that have supported Durkheim's view include William Herbrechtsmeier, 'Buddhism and the Definition of Religion: One More Time', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* vol. 32, no. 1 (1993); Martin Southwold, 'Buddhism and the Definition of Religion', *Man* vol. 13, no. 3 (1978).

¹⁰⁹ Herbrechtsmeier, 'Buddhism and the Definition of Religion: One More Time', pp. 2-5.

¹¹⁰ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 32.

¹¹¹ Thomas, 'Religion and International Conflict', p. 3.

¹¹² Arnal, 'Definition', p. 27.

Durkheim's own solution was to use the notion of 'the sacred' to distinguish religion from other human practices. He wrote that

All known religious beliefs, whether simple or complex, present a common quality: they presuppose a classification of things – the real or ideal things that men represent for themselves – into two classes, two opposite kinds, generally designated by two distinct terms effectively translated by the words *profane* and *sacred*. The division of the world into two comprehensive domains, one sacred, the other profane, is the hallmark of religious thought.¹¹³

A number of other authors writing on religion in international politics have used the concept of the sacred as a mark of religion.¹¹⁴ But can this conceptualisation avoid the Scylla of ethnocentric specificity and the Charybdis of unwieldy generality? I would suggest that not only does it fail to navigate its way through the treacherous straits, it manages to simultaneously fall prey to the beast *and* get sucked into the whirlpool.

The first problem is that the sacred-profane distinction merely reflects a set of categories characteristic of the construction of religion in the post-Reformation West that are inappropriate in other contexts. The initial question concerns what Durkheim meant by 'sacred'. As Timothy Fitzgerald writes, 'if by "sacred" we mean those things, ideas, places, people, stories, procedures, and principles that empirical groups of people value, deem to be constitutive of their collective identity, or will defend to the death, then it seems likely that we have relatively meaningful crosscultural concept'.¹¹⁵ On this basis, it would be hard to deny the universality of the concept. On the other hand though, it would also be impossible to restrict 'religion' to those traditions conventionally thought of as such, and the concept loses any analytical usefulness it might have had.

This is not quite what Durkheim meant though. He defined sacred things as a class of objects protected and isolated by prohibitions, as opposed to the profane as the set of things to which such prohibitions apply. Yet this concept of sacredness is not universal, a fact indicated by problems that have encountered attempts to translate it into

¹¹³ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 36. Emphasis in original.

¹¹⁴ See Haynes, 'Religion, Secularisation and Politics: a Postmodern Conspectus', p. 710; Haynes, 'Religion in International Relations: What are the issues?' p. 455; Silberman, Higgins, and Dweck, 'Religion and World Change: Violence and Terrorism versus Peace', p. 764; Thomas, 'Taking Religious and Cultural Pluralism Seriously: The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Society', p. 820; Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations*, p. 24. See also Silberman, 'Religion as a Meaning System: Implications for the New Millennium'.

¹¹⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, p. 19.

non-European languages such as Arabic.¹¹⁶ Anthropological studies have demonstrated that the distinction does not structure all religions, as Durkheim assumed.¹¹⁷ It is also temporally bounded: a number of scholars have also questioned whether it had a place in premodern Christian discourse.¹¹⁸ Talal Asad argues that other antinomies prevailed in medieval theology, such as ‘the divine’ and ‘the satanic’, both of which were transcendent powers, or ‘the spiritual’ and ‘the temporal’ which were, as I noted in the last chapter, both worldly powers.¹¹⁹

The distinctiveness of the modern concept of sacredness is cast into sharper relief by the heterogeneity of earlier meanings that the word itself carried. For example, it did exist in the French language in the Middle Ages and was used in relation to particular objects, institutions or people (a chalice, the College of Cardinals, or the body of the king), but it did not refer to a set of things that were set apart in any uniform way, or presuppose a particular type of relation to them. This heterogeneity is also evident in early modern English usage. Asad invokes a number of examples from the *Oxford English Dictionary* – ‘the poetic line “That sacred Fruit, sacred to abstinence,” the inscription “sacred to the memory of Samuel Butler,” the address-form “your sacred majesty,” the phrase “a sacred concert”’ – and suggests that it is difficult to conceive of the act of setting apart and venerating as being the same in each case. If the mode in which things were set apart and venerated differed, Asad reasons, it becomes problematic to take sacredness as the object of a single phenomenon called ‘religion’.¹²⁰

Meredith McGuire suggests that the modern conception of the sacred as set apart, awesome, and existing in dichotomous relation with the profane from which it was ritually separated was an effect of the Protestant and Catholic reformations.¹²¹ Given the suspicion that the notion of the sacred is of limited use as an organising device in elucidating religious discourse, it is tempting to conclude that Durkheim’s ideas about the sacred-profane distinction derived their plausibility from the habits of mind he owed to his religious education. This is indeed the conclusion that François-André Isambert has come to in his work on Durkheim. It was principally through the ministrations of Durkheim and his followers that the concept of the sacred acquired its salience in

¹¹⁶ Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* p. 36 n.41.

¹¹⁷ Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, p. 49.

¹¹⁸ Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* pp. 31-32; McGuire, ‘Contested Meanings and Definitional Boundaries: Historicizing the Sociology of Religion’.

¹¹⁹ Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* p. 31.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ McGuire, ‘Contested Meanings and Definitional Boundaries: Historicizing the Sociology of Religion’, p. 130.

academic reflection on religion and the circumstances in which it emerged led Isambert to suspect that the opposition of sacred and profane in his work may in fact be a transposition of the specifically Christian opposition of the temporal and spiritual. On the basis of strong parallels between themes prominent in Durkheim's work and the situation of nineteenth century Catholicism, Isambert argued that there is an 'implicit sociology of Catholicism' in Durkheimian theory.¹²² It may be, then, that 'by the very conditions that have given rise to it, the notion of the sacred is bound to reintroduce surreptitiously the very thing it was supposed to eliminate, namely the preponderance of the Christian model in thinking about religion'.¹²³ He concluded that it can be retained only 'if one no longer asks of it to characterise all religious reality and makes use of it only as a particularly potent structural type, whose empirical validity will only be measured later'.¹²⁴

Numerous exceptions invalidate the sacred-profane dichotomy as a universal intension of religion. If one attempts to use it in a more restricted sense, to characterise religion in the modern West, it becomes apparent that it is too general to exclude what are conventionally thought of as non-religious phenomena. The problem can be illustrated with reference to this definition by Jeffrey Haynes: 'religion can be thought of as (1) a system of beliefs and practices – often but not necessarily related to an ultimate being or beings, or to the supernatural and/or (2) that which is sacred in a society – that is, ultimate beliefs and practices which are inviolate'.¹²⁵ This is no real help in identifying what might count as religion. Through the qualifier 'often but not necessarily', Haynes is perhaps attempting to purge the concept of its theistic specificity (he includes Confucianism as a religion),¹²⁶ but in practice this dissolves any utility in the reference to ultimate beings – religion may involve some kind of belief in ultimate beings, or it may not.

This leaves only the sacred as a potentially viable specific difference. Haynes follows Durkheim in supposing that the exact nature of the division of objects into sacred and profane is not given once and for all universally but is relative to a particular society. In a list of things spoken of as inviolate in liberal democratic societies, one might include the law, human rights and civil liberties, and freedom of speech. It should be remembered that the fundamental document of the French Revolution – the *Declaration of*

¹²² Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, p. 50.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 51.

¹²⁴ Quoted in Ibid., p. 50.

¹²⁵ Haynes, *Introduction to International Relations and Religion*, p. 12.

¹²⁶ Along with Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. Ibid., p. 15.

the Rights of Man of 1789 – contains in its preamble reference to ‘natural, unalienable, and sacred rights of man’, before going on to describe property as ‘an inviolable and sacred right’.¹²⁷ These revolutionary articles are clearly religious within the terms of Haynes definition, and yet the consequence of this broadening of the concept beyond the boundaries of the conventional extension of religion is to remove all grounds for supposing that ‘religion’ designates a particular realm within culture.

In summary then, this ‘structural type’ (in Isambert’s language) is far from universal. It is, however, empirically valid as a description of some forms of religion in modernity, as well as many things in the modern West that are not conventionally thought to be ‘religion’. Certain forms of modern Christianity or Islam (for example) do hedge certain objects with prohibitions, and to the extent that they do, they have more in common with certain modes of modern ‘secular’ practice than with much ‘religion’ in other times and places. What are the implications of this? If the sacred-profane dichotomy is genuinely definitive of religion, one must conclude, against all conventional wisdom, that the modern West is actually more religious than both medieval and certain ‘primitive’ societies. But one might more sensibly interpret these observations as indicating that the sacred-profane distinction is but one more mode of specifying ‘what there is’ for a particular culture, a feature that is in essence neither religious nor secular. Whether or not it is characteristic of a particular tradition must be a matter of empirical enquiry rather than assumed at the start of such an enquiry.

Transcendence, community and everything but materialism

If sacredness, the absolute, and ultimacy all seem to have either functional equivalents in what would commonly be termed secular thinking or a carry heavy freight of ethnocentrism, being either overly general or overly Christian, perhaps the notion of transcendence can provide a unifying principle. Jeffrey Haynes has proposed this definition which combines three differentiae: the ultimate, the sacred and the transcendent:

The term, ‘religion’, can usefully be thought of as having two analytically distinct, yet related meanings. In a *spiritual* sense, religion pertains in three ways to models of social and individual behaviour that help believers to organise their

¹²⁷ Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* p. 32; ‘Declaration of the Rights of Man’, avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/rightsof.asp, accessed 7 January 2009.

everyday lives. First, it is to do with the idea of *transcendence*, that is, it relates to supernatural realities. Second, it is concerned with *sacredness*, that is, a system of language and practice that organises the world in terms of what is deemed holy. Third, it refers to *ultimacy*: it relates people to the ultimate conditions of existence.

In another, *material*, sense, religious beliefs can motivate individuals and groups to act in pursuit of certain goals...Currently, in many countries, religion seems to be an important source of basic value orientations; and this may have social and/or political connotations.¹²⁸

Although Haynes proposes a two-part definition, the definitional work is all done in the first part, with the second part concerned more with the implications of religious belief for social and political action that is not, in itself, religious. This definition is substantially similar to an earlier definition he proposed, in which he treated religion as a species of belief, which he claimed is 'at the core of religion'.¹²⁹ Belief, however, is differentiated as religious by its reference to the same three qualities of transcendence, sacredness and ultimacy: 'Religion is to do with the idea of transcendence, ie it relates to supernatural realities; with sacredness, ie as a system of language and practice that organises the world in terms of what is deemed holy; and by ultimacy, ie it relates people to the ultimate conditions of existence'.¹³⁰ The concerns of religion are then expressed through religious institutions, social groups and movements that exist to pursue these concerns.¹³¹ Adding transcendence to the ideas of sacredness and ultimacy only reproduces the same basic problems associated with those terms. Its meaning is similarly elastic. If it is represented as synonymous with 'the supernatural', as in Haynes definition, this simply repeats the problems already noted with the concept of the supernatural.

The proposal that reference to transcendence is a viable differentia features also in the recent, highly creative effort by Laustsen and Wæver to theorise the difference made to security practice by religion.¹³² Approaching religion as a species of discourse, they write that 'religious discourses share three fundamental traits. First, the principle of discursivisation is faith. Second, faith is coded through the distinction between

¹²⁸ Haynes, *Introduction to International Relations and Religion*, pp. 455-456.

¹²⁹ Haynes, 'Religion, Secularisation and Politics: a Postmodern Conspectus', p. 709.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 710.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 709.

¹³² Laustsen and Wæver, 'In Defence of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization'. A slightly abridged version has been published in Carsten B. Laustsen and Ole Wæver, 'In Defence of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization', in Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopoulos (eds.), *Religion in International Relations: The Return From Exile* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

transcendent and immanent. Third, religious dogmatics and religious behaviour can be seen as ways to bridge the distance between the transcendental and the earthly realm through principles of mediation'.¹³³ Religion is defined here as a discourse invoking a distinction between immanence and transcendence, comprising a set of beliefs and practices, rooted in a groundless decision, designed to overcome the abyss separating the two realms constituted within this discourse itself. The distinction between immanence and transcendence and mediated by faith is the crucial differentia, and the authors draw on the work of Søren Kierkegaard, Georges Bataille and Ninian Smart in order to investigate the way in which it translates into the specific acts, rituals, emotions, doctrines, moral codes, communal practices and iconographic representations that constitute the outward manifestations of religion.¹³⁴

Laustsen and Wæver's difficult piece represents one of the most interesting attempts in the literature on international politics to theorise the essential nature (rather than simply the role) of religion. Nevertheless, this is also its weakness, for I would submit that their efforts are ultimately undone by their otherwise admirable ambition. Their piece seeks to demonstrate that the behaviour of actors in relation to the securitization of religious referent objects is rooted in the essential nature of religion itself. As part of this, rather than simply identifying the specific markers that characteristic of religious discourse, they propose that other features of religion can be accounted for in terms of their relation with these basic elements. The significance of their analytic definition is elaborated within a theory that postulates this distinction between immanence and transcendence as *the* crucial element by which all else that is religious – including the security behaviour of religious actors – can be explained. Laustsen and Wæver's approach attempts, therefore, to discover a feature that is not just held in common by all faiths, but also central and vital to these traditions. This is fascinating but problematic, for the entire analysis is vulnerable to collapse if the differentia stipulated is not found to be present in some tradition commonly described as religion, or even if the attribute identified is present, yet peripheral rather than central. In the case of Laustsen and Wæver's conception, it seems that the distinction between immanence and transcendence they identify as the essence of religious discourse is altogether absent in some traditions. Both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism, for

¹³³ Laustsen and Wæver, 'In Defence of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization', pp. 711-712.

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 713-718. The section on Ninian Smart's 'dimensions of religion' is omitted from the later republication.

example, understand reality as lacking all duality, including the distinction between transcendence and immanence.¹³⁵

The problem arguably lies in how they use Kierkegaard as the basis for their understanding of religion. Kierkegaard was a Protestant theologian, and while they admit that this ‘influenced his understanding of religion’ (in their words), they maintain that Kierkegaard’s work has a more general applicability. The result is that Laustsen and Wæver’s basic framework for understanding religion looks a lot like Christianity. The categories of transcendence and immanence appear to be a direct transposition of the realms of divinity and humanity in Kierkegaard’s thought. Their tendency to use words and phrases such as ‘God’, ‘transcendent entities’ and ‘transcendence’ interchangeably suggests that ‘transcendence’ is intended as a general term referring to objects in different faiths that play a role equivalent to that of God within Christianity.¹³⁶ They admit that this resemblance to Christianity in a revealing footnote:

Kierkegaard’s thinking is distinctly nineteenth-century Protestant and yet, the analytical distinctions can be used generally. Obviously this privileges Christianity – and probably Protestantism – in our study. The impossibility of certainty about salvation is explicit, constitutive and self-conscious here, and at best the general distinction between the immanent and the transcendent can be analysed into other religions.¹³⁷

It is unclear why they assume this to be so. Kierkegaard was no student of comparative religion, and they have to problematically assume that his Christian analysis of the implications of the divine human-relation has a more general applicability. They point out that ‘one has to accept that our the way to the universal (religion as such) goes through the particular (Christianity)’, citing Hegel’s ironic complaint that every time he asked for a piece of fruit at the greengrocers he got an apple or a pear, but never a piece of fruit.¹³⁸ The question here is whether Kierkegaard’s work gives genuine access to a universal logic of religious discourse?

If they accepted the full implications of their own professed understanding of discourse, they would have to conclude that it almost certainly does not. If, as they claim,

¹³⁵ Herbrechtsmeier, ‘Buddhism and the Definition of Religion: One More Time’, p. 12.

¹³⁶ For example, they assert that ‘In religion, being is basically *being before God*, or, in a less monotheistic formulation, being in front of a transcendental realm’. Italics in original. Laustsen and Wæver, ‘In Defence of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization’, p. 719.

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 711, n.724.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 710.

'all discourses constitute the object referred to',¹³⁹ it is far from clear why religious discourse is expected to always reproduce the specific logic they identify. Understanding religion as an object constituted within discourse arguably undermines the very possibility of a universal definition of religion of the kind Laustsen and Wæver seek to provide, for if 'religion' itself, including its content and form, is an effect of specific discursive processes, the logic of religious discourse will accordingly vary historically. Talal Asad has developed this point at length through a historical anthropology of Christianity, in which he argues that

socially identifiable forms, pre-conditions and effects of what was characterised as religion in the medieval epoch were quite different from those so categorised in modern society. Religious power was differently distributed, and had a different thrust. There were different ways in which it created and worked through institutions, different selves which it shaped and responded to, and different categories of knowledge which it authorised and made available. A consequence is that there cannot be a definition of religion which is universally viable because and to the extent that those processes are historically produced, reproduced and transformed.¹⁴⁰

As Asad argues, attending to the logic of a particular religious discourse will give one an insight into the functioning of that specific discourse in that time and place, rather than access to the nature of religion as such. By assuming that Kierkegaard's analysis of the logic of faith can give them access to the essence of religion in general, Laustsen and Wæver fail to recognise that Kierkegaard was himself involved in the discursive production of religion as a certain sort of thing: a practice characterised by a faith-full mediation between the human and the divine. To accept the implications of their own standpoint is to recognise that the logic they identify as characteristic of religion in general is almost certainly historically specific, and that other traditions in other parts of the world may well be ordered through quite different categories.

It is, from this perspective, hard to escape the suspicion that by deriving their theory of religion from Kierkegaard, Laustsen and Wæver mistake the categories and themes of nineteenth century Protestantism for the essence of religion in general. If this

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 713.. It is interesting that this comment is removed from the same paragraph in their later publication of the essay: Laustsen and Wæver, 'In Defence of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization', p. 155. Nevertheless, their account of the securitizing speech act presupposes the same understanding of discourse, and this remains in the later version.

¹⁴⁰ Asad, 'Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz', p. 238.

were so, the structuring of the 'religious' worldview according to a dualism of immanence and transcendence that must be reconciled would then be exposed as a discursive production dependent not on the logic of religion as such, but the specification of 'what there is' within one expression of the Protestant tradition. 'What there is' can of course be construed in radically different and incommensurable ways, as the example of Buddhism suggests, and there is no reason to suppose that this particular construction is universal. Reading the immanent-transcendent distinction and the principle of faith into traditions in which they play no such central role is to ethnocentrically assume that non-Christian traditions are approximations of a paradigm that understood itself most fully in nineteenth-century Copenhagen.

Two other attempts to make the concept of religion more suitable for non-Christian, non-Western traditions can be noted. The first is a understanding of religion proposed by Scott Thomas.¹⁴¹ He has developed the argument that the rise of the state was instrumental in an important change in the concept of religion during the early modern period. Whereas in the late Middle Ages, traditional religion had been understood as a community of believers, the consolidation of the power of the state involved the redefinition of religion as a set of privately held beliefs. International politics scholars have failed to register the significance of religion in the non-Western world, Thomas argued, because they have made the mistake of assuming that non-Western religion can be comprehended in modern terms as a body of beliefs. More appropriate, Thomas argues, is the social definition of religion as a community of believers, because many or most parts of the world are have not entirely made, or are struggling not to make, the transition to the modern conception of religion as a privatised body of beliefs.

Thomas' argument makes the important point that the concept of religion registers important struggles over the form it can take in a globalising world, and he is right to identify an important shift in the imagination of religion in the early modern period. However, the dualistic model of modern and traditional religion is problematic. The social definition of religion as a community of believers that he advocates is drawn from accounts of pre-Reformation Christianity, but there is no reason to assume that this provides a better model for understanding non-Western religion. It seems doubtful that there is such a thing as 'traditional religion' of which medieval Christianity and non-Western religions are all instances. The mistake here is the same as that made by Laustsen and Wæver: in supposing that a specific version of Christianity can be taken as a

¹⁴¹ Thomas, 'Taking Religious and Cultural Pluralism Seriously: The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Society'.

paradigmatic example of more general category of traditional religion, Thomas universalises the categories and forms of late medieval Christianity.

If Laustsen, Wæver and Thomas do not manage to escape the specifically Christian heritage of the concept of religion, others have, but at considerable cost. This survey will conclude with a definition that illustrates the opposite extreme. Richard Falk, in an essay on the contribution religion can make to humane governance, was concerned to promote universalistic and tolerant tendencies in the great world religions rather than regressive exclusivist orientations. His definition of religion is constructed very much in this spirit:

Religion is understood here as encompassing not only the teachings, beliefs, and practices of organized religions, but also all spiritual outlooks that interpret the meaning of life by reference to faith and to the commitment to that which cannot be explained by empirical science or sensory observation and is usually associated with an acceptance of the reality of the divine, the sacred, the holy, the transcendent, the mysterious, the ultimate...religion encompasses belief in God and gods, but does not depend on such theistic convictions, or for that matter, theological dogma of any kind.¹⁴²

It is very difficult to see how anyone might be excluded from this definition, except perhaps the strictest materialists and empiricists. This definition is in many respects more viable than more specific conceptions, because it is so all-encompassing. This quality also makes it very difficult to make any meaningful claims about the potential of religion to contribute to a more humane world order though, because there is very little that is not 'religion'.

Conclusion

The present chapter sought to further problematise the modern discourse of religion by examining the idea that religion is a genus. Insofar as they talk about 'religion' rather than Hinduism, Buddhism etc, scholars presuppose some meaningful commonalities between 'the religions' that make generalisation possible. It was noted in chapter 1 that thrusts and counter-thrusts in the politics *about* religion depend on the assumption that one can make generalisations about the role of religion in politics, and especially the relationship

¹⁴² Falk, 'A Worldwide Religious Resurgence in an Era of Globalisation and Apocalyptic Terrorism', p. 194.

between religion and violence. Chapter 5 will discuss a liberal strategy for mitigating religious conflict that depends on the existence of common features shared by the religions – a strategy that is repeated by Blair. However, if the commonalities that define religion cannot be agreed upon, generalisations about the effects of religion will always remain contentious, as will attempts to promote religious peace by locating a common ground. If they are simply not there, the utility of generalisations about the religion and their ability to resolve the politics *about* religion are both severely compromised. This chapter has suggested that not only are all attempts to define commonalities among the religions essentially contested, there are no commonalities shared by those traditions that are conventionally included in the category. Religion is, on this assessment, likely to remain the object of political controversy.

The present chapter has made two arguments in this direction. The first involves the claim that defining religion by abstracting from a number of specific object-instances that are taken to be ‘religions’ will always produce politically contentious results. The denotation of religion depends on a normative notion of what counts as religion – and this is the case even where the act of inclusion and exclusion is guided by an inherited prejudice according to which the religiousness of certain traditions is assumed to be self-evident.

Secondly, if the diversity of phenomena being labelled ‘religion’ makes it impossible to identify any but the most general shared features, this clearly raises serious questions about the utility of generalising about religion. They are likely to be as unhelpful as those based on an assumption that potatoes, horses and washing machines can be included in a single category. The second argument has been that even if (as many do) we agree on ‘the world religions’ as central examples of the class, there are no common features shared by them that are sufficiently specific to mark off religion as a distinct domain of social practice. Religion may be a politically contested concept, but it is not necessarily an arbitrary and incoherent one. It becomes problematic when the features deemed characteristic of religion are not genuinely present in the traditions included under the rubric of religion, or when the category is defined in such broad terms that the exclusion of other cultural phenomena less conventionally described as religion becomes arbitrary. It has been argued that the particular category of religion assumed in many accounts of the relationship between religion and violence is arbitrary in this sense. This is because uniqueness of religion as a discourse is insisted on (implicitly or otherwise), yet in order to identify genuine commonalities among the diverse ‘world

religions' that are usually included, one would have to define the intension of religion so broadly that it would be impossible to justify exclusion of almost everything else. In this regard, the difficulties encountered by international politics scholars who have sought to explain what they mean by 'religion' have been no different to those bedevilling previous definitional efforts in other disciplines, where scholars have been impelled towards ever greater abstraction by the intransigent diversity of these traditions, undermining the rationale for treating religion as a separate life sphere.

If the diversity of phenomena being labelled 'religion' makes it impossible to identify any but the most general shared features, this clearly raises serious questions about the utility of generalisations about religion in world politics. They are likely to be as unhelpful as those based on an assumption that potatoes, horses and washing machines can be included in a single category. Political problems are raised, though, when one seeks to maintain the distinction between religion and other aspects of life by defining the core of the religious phenomenon or the distinctive features of religious violence more specifically, whilst still including all of those traditions conventionally denoted by the category. This has tended to merely reflect the self-understanding of particular traditions, usually Christianity. In the current climate of tensions between the West and the Muslim majority world, the insistence that other religions should become more like Christianity is likely to be inflammatory, however subtly it is framed. This is argued in chapter 6 to be one problematic implication of the resemblance between Blair's ideal of moderate religion and liberal Christianity.

There are therefore important analytical and political reasons for thinking carefully about how religion is conceptualised in political analysis, and particularly in matters of security. As was discussed in chapter 1, and will become clear again with reference to Blair in chapter 6, interpretations of whether or not conflict is rooted in religion depend on how religion is understood. Yet when these accounts are dependent on conceptions of religion that are highly questionable even within their own terms of reference, one might ask whether there is more going on than simply the unreflective deployment of a set of inherited assumptions. Furthermore, when one notes that these very terms of reference are directly politically contested (in the case of the religion-secular distinction), or involve politically contestable judgments when they are operationalised, the case for attending to the always-politically-charged representation of religion becomes more compelling.

What makes some discourses of religion preferable to others? And what can account for the modern discourse of religion, combining the ideas of religion as an autonomous domain of social practice and a genus, when the empirical validity of this discourse does not stand up to serious scrutiny? In the remaining chapters, this thesis argues that compelling answers to these questions can be provided by attending to discourses of security in the modern West. Conceptions of peace and security have historically provided standards for judging various manifestations of religion, distinguishing between true and false, good and bad religion. In the context of the confessional violence of the early modern period, two solutions were put forward that made a powerful contribution to the constitution of religion as a differentiated sphere and as a genus. During the seventeenth century, the conceptualisation of religion was driven more by security concerns mingled with confessional Christian commitments than by detailed ethnographic knowledge of the religions of the world. The implication of this is that security discourse must be considered a particularly important site for the construction of religion in modern liberal societies, and therefore that the contemporary interest in religion as a security issue is especially significant for the politics *about* religion. It is to these issues that we will now turn in Part II of the thesis, which begins to focus the discussion on the contribution of security thinking to the production of specific discourses of religion.

PART II

‘RELIGION’ IN LIBERAL DISCOURSES OF SECURITY

4 SECURITY AND THE DIFFERENTIATION OF RELIGION

Part I sought to denaturalise prevailing assumptions about the concept of religion and politicise its construction. It was argued that the conceptualisation of religion should be understood as part of a politics *about* religion, in which struggles over its social role and the form that it should normatively take are played out through discourses and between discourses of 'religion'. It was proposed that this politics *about* religion is hidden, for the most part, by the assumption that the political arguments begin *after* religion has been defined. Chapters 2 and 3 argued that even the most taken for granted assumptions about the phenomenon – that it is a subsection of culture and a genus – involve disputed normative judgements about the character of religion and the proper ordering of society.

Part II now explores the productive role of liberal security discourses in the politics *about* religion. This chapter builds on and extends the argument developed in chapter 2, that secularisation should be understood as a politically contested discursive process. It explores the role played by liberal conceptions of security in the invention of religion as a separate domain of life. It is proposed that two dynamics contributed to the rise of the idea that religion was a discrete sphere. The first was produced by the concrete limits on the public expression of religion that were imposed by the liberal strategy of separating religion and political power. This effected a transformation, to some extent, in actual, extant religion, shaping what was 'there' in the way of faith for later generations to observe and theorise. The conclusion that religion was by its very nature a discrete life-sphere was simultaneously reinforced by the second dynamic, which justified the secularising strategy in religious terms. This was the claim that the differentiation of politics and religion was overcoming distortions of religion and returning it to its true nature and its proper domain. This liberal strategy was not just instrumental in a disentanglement of politics and religion, it was actively constitutive of new understandings of both politics and religion, and served to construct religion as one dimension of life alongside others.

The entire edifice rested on the idea that there could be a confession-independent account of security that could provide the criteria for judging what kinds of religion were acceptable. This idea persists today, with security functioning as a standard according to

which different manifestations of religion can be categorised as ‘moderate’ or ‘extremist’. However, it emerged simultaneously with the differentiation of politics and religion and depends for its cogency on the idea that they are genuinely separate.

The account of liberal approaches to security also points forward to chapter 6, in which it is argued, with reference to Tony Blair’s evaluation of Islam, that liberal security discourse remains a potent site for the production of normative forms of religion. The present chapter has two interrelated objectives, both linked to the overarching question of how religion has been constituted in liberal accounts of security. The first objective is to examine how liberal security discourse functions as a standard to define constructive and destructive forms of religion. It is proposed that religion compatible with liberal security arrangements is not only represented as acceptable, but as being closer to true religion than illiberal forms. The chapter also seeks to problematise the notion that security can provide a neutral, objective and non-confessional standard for classifying religion. This argument is made theoretically, by discussing the implications of recent arguments that security and peace are derivative concepts. It is also supported empirically, by arguing that liberal visions of domestic peace could only be implemented by displacing an older Christian project of peace vying for the same social space. Security could only become regarded as a neutral standard once social peace among human beings was de-confessionalised, made ‘political’ rather than ‘religious’, and no longer conceived as dependent on the specific discourses and practices of Christianity.

This was, of course, a secularising move, and the second objective of the chapter is to provide an account of the contribution made by liberal security discourse to the imagination of religion as a differentiated sphere. Briefly stated, the constitution of ‘politics’ and ‘religion’ as separate domains of human endeavour was a security strategy developed in response to the Wars of Religion in the seventeenth century. The chapter also seeks to question whether the boundaries thus established between the spheres can really be as impermeable as liberals suppose. It is claimed here that they cannot. The differentiation of politics and religion cannot be proposed without making theological judgements, and can only be secured through constant direct or indirect regulation of religious activity. Where chapter 2 pointed out that ‘political religion’ undermines the differentiation of spheres, this chapter proposes that the government of religion by political authorities has the same effect.

Liberalism is understood here as a discursive tradition of political belief and practice, privileging a political order in which diverse individual conceptions of the good

can be pursued, a political order whose necessity is derived from universal features of human nature.¹ The approach taken here does not aspire to provide a comprehensive account of liberal orientations towards religion. The aim is rather to outline a particular historical trajectory through a discussion of works that illustrate key moments in its progress. The focus here is on early liberalism, from its immediate precursors in sixteenth century *raison d'état* through to Adam Smith in the late eighteenth century. This focus is determined by the fact that it was during this period that the relationship between Christianity and social peace was discussed as a problem. Security and religion began to go their separate ways in the eighteenth century; religion became more a matter of the individual whereas security was increasingly conceived as a problem of inter-state relations. The effect, in combination with a less volatile Christianity, was that reflection on religion as a security problem largely faded until the late twentieth century, when it was problematised anew. An important illustration of this, to be discussed in chapter 6, was Blair's public reflections on Islam.

The chapter begins by outlining the problems involved in measuring peace against a supposedly non-confessional conception of security. The section that follows argues that peace was the objective of a distinctively Christian social project during the Middle Ages, and the neutrality of the secular liberal peace could only be secured through redefining the essential character of the Christian tradition itself. The third section details the emergence of this secular conception of peace as centred on a state that promotes no particular religion – and no overarching good. The fourth section examines how the perceived requirements of peace within the state produced a growing differentiation of the spheres of politics and religion, articulated most fully by Locke. The final section discusses the emergence of the liberal political economy paradigm, in which the social conditions of security are generated spontaneously through the unhindered operation of market mechanisms.

4.1 Good Religion, Bad Religion: Measuring Faith against Peace and Security

It has been argued that the conceptualisation of religion as a genus and as a differentiated sphere are not usually recognised as political acts. More obviously partial are the normative judgements involved in the characterisation and classification of different types of religion. Few today would insist that all religion is entirely good or that all

¹ See the introduction for a fuller description.

religion is wholly bad; most people would maintain that there are better and worse types of religion. This is assumed when distinctions are made between faith that is 'tolerant', 'inclusive', 'humane' and 'progressive' and that which is not.² Tony Blair's representation of faith as coming in 'moderate' and 'extremist' varieties is a notable recent example of this that will be discussed in the final chapter. What is interesting, however, is the supposition made by Blair and many others that there is a standard external to religion according to which particular manifestations of it can be judged and classified that is not in itself theologically contentious.³ One standard often invoked is morality: bad religion is that which teaches doctrines and practices that are not morally justifiable according to a natural law or common morality, whose precepts can be discovered by autonomous human reason.⁴ As Alasdair MacIntyre and others have charged though, it is highly questionable whether moral standards float free of particular traditions, or that there is an account of justice to which all rational persons would be compelled to give their allegiance by the very fact of their rationality.⁵ It is equally plausible to suggest that a particular scheme of moral beliefs will only seem self-evident when viewed in the light of a specific cultural inheritance.

The present chapter argues that the requirements of social peace and security provide an important standard within liberalism for distinguishing good religion from bad. However, it can also be noted that taking a conception of security or peace as the standard to which religious practices must measure up raises similar problems as the attempt to make morality into a tradition-neutral standpoint. This suspicion is raised when one notes recent work exploring the derivative nature of concepts of security and peace. Recent questioning of the assumptions that have governed thinking about these issues in International Politics have emphasised that these concepts are contested and multivalent, deriving from fundamental assumptions about relationships between and within human collectivities.

The meaning of security, for example, was largely unexplored for much of the Cold War era, as scholars shared an implicit understanding of its meaning.⁶ Since the

² e.g. Falk, 'A Worldwide Religious Resurgence in an Era of Globalisation and Apocalyptic Terrorism'; Hasenclever and Rittberger, 'Does Religion Make a Difference? Theoretical Approaches to the Impact of Faith on Political Conflict'; Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*.

³ Astutely noted by Terry Nardin, 'Epilogue', in Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopoulos (eds.), *Religion in International Relations: The Return From Exile* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 274.

⁴ Terry Nardin is one advocate of such an approach. Ibid.

⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 36-78 in particular; MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 346. Also William Connolly, *Why I am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 33.

⁶ A notable exception was Arnold Wolfers, "'National Security' as an Ambiguous Symbol", *Political Science Quarterly* vol. 67, no. 4 (1952).

1980s, the meaning of security has been the focus of intense debate.⁷ Ken Booth, for example, has mounted a theoretical challenge to mainstream assumptions about the concept in security studies.⁸ 'When people speak about security, or carry out practices in the name of security, their words and actions are embedded in their deepest conceptions of the nature of world politics (even if they are not articulated)'.⁹ The dominant discourse as security as a matter of military power and strategic relations between states is, for Booth, an expression of the basic theoretical and philosophical assumptions of the theories dominant in security studies – realism in particular.¹⁰ R.B.J. Walker has similarly written that 'Questions about security cannot be separated from the most basic questions of political theory', adding that it 'cannot be understood, or reconceptualised, or reconstructed, without paying attention to the constitutive account of the political that has made the prevailing accounts of security seem to plausible'.¹¹ Recent anthropological work has confirmed the plurality of discourses and practices of security, emphasising that the meanings of danger and harm they embody and the practices they enjoin in response are often rooted in religious traditions.¹²

Peace studies scholars have similarly sought to question the obviousness and criticise the narrowness of the prevailing liberal model of peace as the absence of war between states, achieved through democracy and market economies. More comprehensive notions of peace were developed during the Cold War in a fashion that prefigured the expansion of security and led to a degree of convergence recently with the more expansive critical approaches to that concept.¹³ Johan Galtung, for example,

⁷ Recent discussions of security as a contested concept include David Baldwin, 'The Concept of Security', *Review of International Studies* vol. 23 (1997); Buzan, *People, States and Fear*; Smith, 'The Contested Concept of Security'.

⁸ Booth, 'Security and Emancipation'; Booth, 'Security and Self: Confessions of a Fallen Realist'; Booth, *Theory of World Security*.

⁹ Booth, *Theory of World Security*, pp. 109, 150-172, quote at 160-161. Other critiques of narrow, statist-military discourses of security include Mathews, 'Redefining Security'; Ullman, 'Redefining Security'; Wyn Jones, *Security, Strategy, and Critical Theory*, pp. 93-123.

¹⁰ For work that explores the political-theoretical assumptions that inform approaches to security, in addition to Booth's work already referenced, see Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, 'Liberalism and Security: The Contradictions of the Liberal Leviathan' (Copenhagen: Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, 1998); Neocleous, *Critique of Security*; Walker, 'Security, Sovereignty, and the Challenge of World Politics'; Walker, 'The Subject of Security'; Williams, 'Identity and the Politics of Security'; Michael C. Williams, 'Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics', *International Studies Quarterly* vol. 47 (2003).

¹¹ Walker, 'The Subject of Security', pp. 63, 69.

¹² Nils Bubandt, 'Vernacular Security: The Politics of Feeling Safe in Global, National and Local Worlds', *Security Dialogue* vol. 36, no. 3 (2005); Alexandra Kent, 'Reconfiguring Security: Buddhism and Moral Legitimacy in Cambodia', *Security Dialogue* vol. 37, no. 3 (2006).

¹³ For some critical security scholars, the influence has been direct: Booth, *Theory of World Security*, pp. 64-69. A recent attempt to fertilise peace research with insights from critical security studies is Matti Jutila, Samu Pehkonen, and Tarja Väyrynen, 'Resuscitating a Discipline: An Agenda for Critical Peace Research', *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* vol. 36, no. 3 (2008).

described the prevailing conception of peace in 1969 as 'negative peace', in addition to which he sought to add a concern for 'positive peace'.¹⁴ The latter, for Galtung, is the absence of 'structural violence' – an unequal distribution of power and resources within society. Others have pointed to the 'contested discourses and multiple concepts of peace' throughout the world that have been neglected by international politics scholars.¹⁵

There are four implications of these critiques for this project. Firstly, when a security standard is invoked in relation to religion, the meaning of labels such as 'extremist' and 'moderate' can only be fleshed out by attending to the conception of peace or security that is presupposed. Secondly, examining the conceptions of security informing particular judgements about religion can bring to light the politics *through* religion, in which religion-talk feeds into the discursive naturalisation of particular political orders and practices. Describing religion that is incompatible with a liberal political order as 'extremism' implicitly delegitimises all opposition to liberal political orders whilst asserting their desirability. The third implication is that arguments about what counts as constructive and destructive religion cannot be settled by reference to security as an impartial standard, because every particular conception of security derives from a contestable set of assumptions about the world. These three points will be carried forward to the discussion of Blair's representation of Islam in chapter 6, along with the fourth and final point.

This is the observation that if religious traditions also sustain particular conceptions of peace and distinctive social projects for its realisation, then maintaining that liberal security discourse can serve as an impartial standard that can be agreed upon by all must inevitably involve a politics *about* religion. Where religious traditions understand their communal life in terms incommensurable with, for example, a liberal market democracy, there will be a contest over the social space claimed by competing projects of peace. Any attempt to implement or defend a liberal peace must negotiate this circumstance. The confirmed liberal peace advocate might, under these circumstances, deploy a strategy of 'conversion', challenging the substantive claims of the religious tradition concerning peace. Alternatively, he might claim that there is, properly understood, no conflict between them by redefining the boundaries of religion to render non-religious the collective, public space of civil government and the market through

¹⁴ Johan Galtung, 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research', *Journal of Peace Research* vol. 6, no. 3 (1969).

¹⁵ Oliver Richmond, 'Critical Research Agendas for Peace: The Missing Link in the Study of International Relations', *Alternatives* vol. 32 (2007), p. 251. See also Johan Galtung, 'Social Cosmology and the Concept of Peace', *Journal of Peace Research* vol. 18, no. 2 (1981); Wæver, 'Peace and Security: Two Concepts and their Relationship'.

which the liberal peace is achieved. This second alternative is, of course, the secularising strategy of differentiation, but it does not avoid the politics *about* religion. It simply displaces it, centring it anew on questions such as the importance of the embodied, communal dimension of religious traditions and the boundaries between the religious and the secular.

The situation hypothetically presented in the last paragraph, in which two conceptions of peace are vying for the same social space, was an actuality in early modern Europe. The conception of peace that would in due course be taken up by liberalism – a ‘negative peace’ of civility and the absence of physical violence – was, in the sixteenth century, ranged against an older ‘positive’ Christian conception of peace as mutual forgiveness, love and social justice. This was a division within competing articulations of Christianity, and in some places conformed to the Protestant-Catholic divide. The concept of peace, and more generally the social implications of Christianity, were themselves disputed issues in the Wars of Religion. Authors such as Grotius and Hobbes who responded to this conflict by pushing the secularising differentiation of politics and religion effectively took sides in it, for they privileged the more minimal negative peace of civility. Yet this advocacy of a minimal peace of non-interference could be represented as non-partisan because it was pursued through the second strategy of secularising ‘peace’ rather than the first strategy of substantive conversion. The minimal peace was constructed as non-confessional, more basic than all particular religious visions. Its priority over rival conceptions of social peace was founded on certain supposedly indisputable facts about human life that provided the basis for a non-confessional account of necessary political principles.

Peace and security – whose meanings overlapped in the early modern period¹⁶ – were thus removed from the proper sphere of religion, or rather all religious projects of social peace had to be consistent with the new secular standard. In practice, when the teachings of religion came into conflict with the liberal peace, it was religion that would have to give way. Some types of religion were more compatible with it than others, however. It could only be argued that the social and political project of liberalism did not rival the Christian peace by representing those confessions – Protestant in particular – that emphasised an interiorised piety of the soul as being closer to the essence of true Christianity than those for whom bodily participation in social sacraments and rituals was important. The implications of this become most clear in Locke, who described religion

¹⁶ Wæver, ‘Peace and Security: Two Concepts and their Relationship’, p. 59.

as existing essentially outside of a civil space in which security is guaranteed by the sovereign. Religious commitment could be expressed through embodied actions but these were constructed as secondary and inessential. It could then be argued on this basis that because discussion of civil peace did not touch on any matters essential to religion, there could be no possible conflict between genuine religion and a liberal political order.

There are, then, reasons for doubting the self-understanding of liberalism as a neutral, common-sense alternative to religious conflict.¹⁷ It effectively took sides in the struggle between two different conceptions of Christian peace, seeking, in the process, to denude peace of all dependence on authorisation by Christian discourse. Yet the dualism set up between the realms of 'politics' and 'religion' could only be maintained by insisting that religion remain within its proper bounds, thus invoking a normative conception of what genuine religion must be. Security, like morality, does not occupy an unproblematically secular space, for this space can itself only be carved out by making contentious judgements about the character and purpose of religion. These judgements, as Hurd points out, are theological as much as political.¹⁸ Those who rule still determine the religion of the realm.

This points to a tension within liberalism. The insistence that religion must take a particular form and keep its proper place is intended to safeguard the differentiation between the spheres, to allow politics to be politics and religion to be religion. Although recent British governments have not generally been charged with promoting a specific religious agenda, as the Bush administration in the United States was suspected of doing, anxiety that the state should not privilege any one religious position has been evident in debates over the place of bishops in the House of Lords and the state funding of faith schools. In these cases, concern centres on the financial and institutional support of particular faith traditions. At the same time however, the need to police this boundary and regulate religion to keep it within its proper bounds also seems to compromise the religious neutrality of the state and its citizens right to freedom of conscience. Many liberals were, for this reason, critical of the French government's ban in 2004 on the

¹⁷ An idea expressed by Jeffrey Stout, who has written that 'liberal principles were the right ones to adopt when competing religious beliefs and divergent conceptions of the good embroiled Europe in the religious wars...Our modern ancestors were right to secularize public discourse in the interest of minimizing the ill effects of religious disagreement'. Quoted in Cavanaugh, "'A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House': The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State", p. 397.

¹⁸ Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*, pp. 35, 42.

wearing of Muslim headscarves in school as having overstepped the boundaries, advocating in response a stricter separation of church and state.¹⁹

As Saba Mahmood has argued, this response fails to recognise that the boundary between the religious and the secular is constantly patrolled by the state.²⁰ The political circumscription of religion becomes most evident in those controversial cases where it is opposed in the name of religious freedom, but concentrating on these instances obscures how the state is constantly taking positions on religion and the limits of religious expression in public. It is not uncommon to encounter Americans claiming to possess 'a system of religious liberty that remains unsurpassed in history'.²¹ Yet Winnifred Sullivan has demonstrated that even in that country, the courts are constantly compelled to decide on the religious status of burial practices, Mormon polygamy, Native American sacred lands and many other issues.²² In such cases, the government becomes the arbiter of orthodoxy. Furthermore, the effectiveness and stability of the differentiation of the spheres has depended on a transformation of the religious domain through legal reforms predicated on a certain understanding of what is essential and what is indifferent to religion. This regulation extends into the very promotion of certain kinds of religious subjectivity, normative conceptions of how religious believers should orientate themselves to their own history (effectively, how they should interpret their own tradition), and privileged modes of scriptural interpretation.

Mahmood has explored this governmental sensibility evident in an alliance between secular Muslim reformers and the U.S. Government.²³ Both, she argued, are aiming to promote a particular religious sensibility within Islam, involving a conception of Quranic truth as symbolic and abstract rather than allegorical or literal, to be flexibly interpreted by individual believers in accordance with the imperatives of secular liberal rule rather than received from authorities. Her argument has more recently received confirmation in the pages of the establishment periodical *Foreign Affairs*, where Thomas Farr, the former director of the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, argued that the certain kinds of religion should be encouraged for reasons of

¹⁹ Mahmood, 'Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation', p. 326.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Farr, 'Diplomacy in an Age of Faith: Religious Freedom and National Security', p. 124.

²² Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

²³ Mahmood, 'Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation'. On the United States public diplomacy campaign in the Muslim-majority world, see David Kaplan, 'Hearts, Minds and Dollars: In an Unseen Front in the War on Terrorism, America is Spending Millions...To Change the Very Face of Islam', *U.S. News & World Report*, 5 April 2005.

security.²⁴ Freedom of religion will generally tend to promote stable self-government in societies with powerful religious groups, he argued, and there is even no reason why religious groups should not influence the political system 'within the bounds of liberal norms'.²⁵ However, the United States should also make it a foreign policy priority to 'encourage internal reform', support more liberal political theologies and 'empower' religious leaders who are open to democratic norms.²⁶

The link between particular norms of religious expression and an international security regime founded on liberal democratic government is made explicit here. When the financial and diplomatic resources of the world's sole superpower are thrown behind the promotion of a particular discourse of normal or 'moderate' religion, the constitutive power of this discourse is inevitably amplified. Chapter 6 will explore similar themes in Tony Blair's judgements about the true nature of Islam, and the proper direction it must take in a globalising and interdependent world. In the present chapter, it is important to note that because the maintenance of boundaries between what is religious and what is secular and political depends upon a normative regulation of religion, the very separation between the two spheres is rendered illusory. In chapter 2 it was argued that the increasing political assertiveness of religious movements tends to erase any distinction between religion and non-religion. Here we can note the same dynamic in operation from the other direction. The need to govern religion in order to secure secular liberal politics undoes in practice the very separation of spheres that is rhetorically upheld.

This constant regulation of religion thus undermines the normative liberal separation of spheres, but it should not be understood as a negation of liberal politics or following a logic external to it. Talal Asad has pointed out that the state can take decisions that affect religion, but not vice versa, arguing that this should be understood as an expression of sovereign prerogative to decide on the exception, as outlined by Carl Schmitt. While the distinction of spheres is normative, the power to decide on when this norm can be set aside lies with sovereign political actors, and not with religious believers.²⁷

Precedent for the exercise of this power can be found in liberal political thought. It is notable that Locke, whilst making strict distinctions between the proper spheres of

²⁴ Farr, 'Diplomacy in an Age of Faith: Religious Freedom and National Security'.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 116.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 118-123.

²⁷ Talal Asad, 'Trying to Understand French Secularism', in Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan (eds.), *Political Theologies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 504; Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab, 2nd ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

politics and religion, also gave the sovereign considerable powers to act against or outside of the law in cases where the law is no useful guide.²⁸ This prerogative was justified by Locke in terms of the public good, but what this might mean in particular instances could be legislated in advance, and hence the executive has considerable latitude to decide on what kind of exceptional interventions are necessary. Here it becomes apparent that framing evaluations of religion in terms of security possesses a greater power than invoking a standard of morality, not only because security is a prestigious political value because also because it justifies the exercise of sovereign prerogative. The public good, for Locke, was the safety of the people, and by extension it is security within Lockean liberalism that can often justify overriding the taboo on intervention in matters of religion.

It is argued in this chapter and the next that the emergence of a secular conception of security, a differentiated sphere of religion, and a peace grounded on the identification of a minimal, lowest common denominator version of religion (chapter 5) was only possible following a movement away from an earlier Christian conception of social peace as rooted in the specific discourses and sacramental practices of the Christian faith. The next section details this conception of peace and the challenge to it, suggesting that competing visions of peace were themselves at stake in the Wars of Religion.

4.2 Before Liberalism: The Medieval Peace

It is when we historicise these seemingly familiar concepts that the discontinuities become apparent between the notions of peace prevalent in the Middle Ages and more modern conceptions of peace and security.²⁹ It is worth briefly outlining the major trajectories of the former, to highlight the distinctive shape of the liberal understanding of the relationship between religion and domestic tranquillity. Peace in the Middle Ages was a much more comprehensive concept than the prevailing liberal notion. Augustine's reflections provided the general categories that were further interpreted, extended and altered; his thought shaped a particular political and ecclesiological sensibility that

²⁸ Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, pp. 374-380. For a fuller discussion on Locke on prerogative, see Clement Fatovic, 'Constitutionalism and Contingency: Locke's Theory of Prerogative', *History of Political Thought* vol. 25, no. 2 (2004). Rousseau also expresses the idea that the law can be suspended when public security is at stake and the law is itself an obstacle to safety: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (London: Penguin, 1968), p. 171.

²⁹ Wæver, 'Peace and Security: Two Concepts and their Relationship', p. 54.

resonated widely in debates and polemics even when he was not directly cited.³⁰ Among the most influential was a threefold distinction between personal, social and eschatological peace.³¹ Briefly put, personal or spiritual peace was that of the individual relation of body and soul, which could only be harmonious through personal union with God.³² Social peace was the unity of the city of God, whose image was the Church. Social peace followed from spiritual peace: men are naturally moved to foster social unity when they have peace of the heart.³³ Eschatological peace was the perfect and eternal peace that would be enjoyed by the faithful after they have endured the temptations of this life.³⁴

I shall focus here on social peace as the most relevant to my purposes, but it should be noted that the peace of the individual soul and those of the different levels of sociality within the Christian community (the household, the city and the world) were connected in a micro/macrocosmic relationship.³⁵ Attempts at peace at any one of these levels without regard to the others would be doomed to disaster.³⁶ This was because true peace was a matter of order and harmony. It was as an ontological condition realised in actuality when things were where they should be according to their divinely-appointed natures. In Augustine's words, 'The peace of all things lies in the tranquillity of order, and order is the disposition of equal and unequal things in such a way as to give to each its proper place'.³⁷ It involved the right relation of parts to a whole, whether this whole was a person, a household, a city or the cosmos.³⁸ For Augustine, true peace must embody absolute consensus and harmony, not because it is founded in conventional human agreement, but because it is an expression of infinite peace in which all temporal things have a proper place, even if this order is constantly remade in ever-new but equally harmonious configurations.³⁹

Social or ecclesial peace then, as with every other kind of peace, was a matter of the right ordering of social relations. There were two principle avenues through which

³⁰ Dyson, *Normative Theories of Society and Government in Five Medieval Thinkers*, p. 54.

³¹ Thomas Renna, 'The Idea of Peace in the West, 500-1150', *Journal of Medieval History* vol. 6, no. 3 (1980), p. 147.

³² Augustine, *City of God*, pp. 918-925, 940-941 [XIX, 914, 914].

³³ Ibid., pp. 640-641, 921, 940-945 [XV, 645, XIX, 644, 614-616].

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 932, 964 [XIX, 910, 928].

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 944-945 [XIX, 917]; Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, pp. 408-410; Otto von Guericke, *Political Theories of the Middle Ages*, trans. F.W. Maitland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), pp. 7-11.

³⁶ Williams, 'Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the City of God', p. 63.

³⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, pp. 938 [XIX, 913].

³⁸ Renna, 'The Idea of Peace in the West, 500-1150', p. 147.

³⁹ Milbank makes this point about Augustine's view of justice, but the point holds equally for his approach to peace. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 415.

this was attempted. The first sought to realise a positive, sacral peace of reconciliation through the institutions of Christianity as ‘a saving machinery of social integration’, in John Bossy’s phrase.⁴⁰ The true peace would only be fully realised in heaven as the complete absence of conflict, but it could be partially realised in the unity of the Church, a universal community characterised by forgiveness, mutual love and justice.⁴¹ From at least the late tenth century, the Christian ideal of peace as a positive relationship grounded in love and forgiveness, and embodying concord, justice, prosperity and order, informed most if not all theoretical and practical peacemaking efforts.⁴² This conception was actively promoted by the Church but adopted also in lay practice. Kiril Petkov observes that by the turn of the millennium, ‘the religious ethics of peace, although not seldom disregarded, had seeped down into the lay society and constituted the organizing frame of a welter of social practices’.⁴³ Even when they involved the laity though, they were invariably centred on the ritual and liturgy of the Church. They could be embodied in exceptional movements, such as the tenth and eleventh century Peace and Truce of God movement, or the *Bianchi* of the late fourteenth century.⁴⁴ They could also find expression in more regularised practices. The general conception of peace as friendship rather than the effect of victory was evident, for example, in the obligation placed on members of fraternities and guilds to settle disputes by arbitration rather than through appeal to the law.⁴⁵

Petkov highlights two notable aspects of the high medieval approach to peace. First of all, attempts to realise peace by both major movements and small groups shared the idea that

the condition of peace was the sum of the private acts undertaken by individual peace-makers...Peace was not thought of as an accomplishment of the authorities even though it was frequently propagated and orchestrated by them. It was an intensely personal involvement, invariably described in terms of giving up personal hostility and of demonstrations of individual good-will. The

⁴⁰ Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700*, p. 161.

⁴¹ Augustine, *City of God*, pp. 938 [XIX, 913].

⁴² John Bossy, 'Holiness and Society', *Past and Present* vol. 75 (1977), p. 131; Kiril Petkov, *The Kiss of Peace: Ritual, Self and Society in the High and Late Medieval West* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 3-4.

⁴³ Petkov, *The Kiss of Peace*, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁴ Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700*, p. 60; H.E.J. Cowdrey, 'The Peace and Truce of God in the Eleventh Century', *Past and Present* vol., no. 46 (1970); Petkov, *The Kiss of Peace*.

⁴⁵ Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700*, p. 60.

medieval peace, it seems, was unthinkable without the face-to-face, personal encounter and cooperation of former enemies.⁴⁶

Secondly, it was 'embodied in standardised performances'.⁴⁷ These personal encounters were structured by theologically-infused rituals, which united theory and practice, inner dispositions and outer behaviour. The central performance here was the mass itself, which involved a sacrificial element making possible the restoration of relations between man and God, returning the universe to a condition of peace, and a sacramental element which completed what the sacrifice made possible: the communion, or common union of the Church and Christ.⁴⁸

It was the mass from which all other extra-ecclesial peacemaking activities flowed, indeed, from which peace itself flowed. It is no coincidence therefore that the most important and powerful rite associated with lay peacemaking from the tenth century onwards was the kiss of peace, which had long been central to the mass.⁴⁹ It symbolised a peace that was both actively forged between people and received from God, for at the mass, it was exchanged among the faithful immediately after the bond of peace and charity had been received at the altar from God.⁵⁰ It signified nothing less than the fulfilment of the 'Peace of Jerusalem' (of which Augustine had written)⁵¹ through which human beings were reconciled to each other in God.⁵² The holy kiss was the mechanism that linked social and heavenly orders in a brotherly peace for which forgiveness and reconciliation were crucial. It was the symbolic core of true peace, reaffirming common membership of the Christian community and freeing the heart of worldly hatred, the most powerful of the passions.⁵³

There were, in summary, efforts made in the Middle Ages to mitigate the violence of the feudal order through a conception of peace as positive, realised between people, involving localised charity, forgiveness and reconciliation rather than centralised temporal authority, legal mechanisms or coercive power.⁵⁴ Within this paradigm, peace was

⁴⁶ Petkov, *The Kiss of Peace*, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ John Bossy, 'The Mass as a Social Institution, 1200-1700', *Past and Present* vol., no. 100 (1983).

⁴⁹ On the significance of the kiss of peace in early Christian practice, see Petkov, *The Kiss of Peace*, pp. 13-18.

⁵⁰ Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700*, p. 69; Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, p. 146.

⁵¹ Augustine, *City of God*, pp. 932-933 [XIX, 912].

⁵² Petkov, *The Kiss of Peace*, p. 3.

⁵³ Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700*, p. 60; Petkov, *The Kiss of Peace*, p. 3. Whether this was actually the case is another matter: the spirit of enmity could just as easily be transferred to an external enemy.

Bossy, 'Holiness and Society', p. 122.

⁵⁴ See also Renna, 'The Idea of Peace in the West, 500-1150', pp. 151-160.

something actively forged, a participation in God's historical restoration of harmonious order in a creation distorted by sin rather than something imposed or enforced from above. There were some in the Church, notably the Patristic writer Origen, who envisaged a total retreat of coercive, temporal power in the face of expanding relations of love and forgiveness.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, any such hopes were dashed, as efforts to enact this order were intermittent at best, and ultimately failed.

Two tendencies contributed to this failure. Firstly, there was a renewed assertion of temporal authority in the high and late Middle Ages. Political fragmentation, civil wars and the absence of effective central authority during the ninth and tenth centuries prompted much nostalgic reflection on a supposed golden age of Charlemagne during the eighth century, and this kept alive the Constantinian ideal of an imperial peace administered by a Christian emperor. The persistence of temporal power was also sustained in part by the expectation that it would remain necessary. It was Augustine's resignation to the continuing need of coercive power that prevailed in the Middle Ages, rather than the greater optimism of Origen. Augustine expected that human sin would persist until the end of time, and so life in a fallen world could only be bearable under some public authority capable of limiting its destructive effects. Such rule, he wrote, 'coerces even sinners into the bond of its earthly peace'.⁵⁶ In the words of an eleventh century Bishop of Cambrai, 'The bishop's task is to pray; it is for the king to fight. Thus, kings should curb strife by force, end wars, and promote the concerns of peace. Bishops should exhort them to fight manfully for the public safety and should pray for them to be victorious'.⁵⁷ Temporal power regrouped though, regaining its strength from the eleventh century as increasingly powerful lay rulers co-opted the rites and symbols of the ecclesial peace. While initially claiming to act on behalf of the Church, defending Christendom and enforcing orthodoxy and so forth, they increasingly claimed to receive their political authority and responsibility for keeping the peace directly from God.⁵⁸ The rediscovery of Aristotelian political ideas provided a theoretical rationale for such claims. As early as the fourteenth century, Marsilius of Padua was arguing that earthly political communities were natural rather than a tragic consequence of sin, possessed their own material ends independent of spiritual ends, and were self-sufficient in the means of realising them.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 427.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Dyson, *Normative Theories of Society and Government in Five Medieval Thinkers*, p. 37.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Cowdrey, 'The Peace and Truce of God in the Eleventh Century', p. 64.

⁵⁸ Renna, 'The Idea of Peace in the West, 500-1150', p. 156.

⁵⁹ Dyson, *Normative Theories of Society and Government in Five Medieval Thinkers*, pp. 227-264.

The second development was the increasing centralisation of ecclesial power in the papacy and a drift towards the dominance of canon law in the operations and procedures of the Church. Until the mid-eleventh century, local bishops enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy from Rome. Thereafter, the machinery of papal government grew rapidly and popes began to assert their authority over the bishops.⁶⁰ They became increasingly concerned with the formulation and enforcement of law and papal lawyers, asserting papal claims to supremacy over Christendom against the Emperor, developed doctrines of unlimited sovereignty that would eventually be taken up by absolutist states.⁶¹ The papacy increasingly took over the peacemaking role of the Church from local bishops, as litigants gravitated towards the increasing power and prestige of Rome. There was movement in the other direction too, as the new spirit of legalism began to penetrate local bishoprics, monasteries and parishes. The very concept of 'the Church' was transformed, as it was increasingly regarded by its agents as a legally defined and contractual body rather than a community of reconciliation. Thus the traditional pastoral element of ecclesial rule became infused with codes of enforceable regulation as the bishop was now somebody with juridical powers rather than simply he who presided over the Eucharist.⁶² As the papacy weakened in the late Middle Ages, the rulers of centralising European states began to assert their domestic dominance over the Church. Gradually, as Michel Foucault has demonstrated, both the legal innovations of the medieval papacy and the pastoral spirit of Christian rule migrated into the emergent sovereign state, feeding into the disciplinary rule of the early modern *polizeistaat* and eventually the governmentality of liberal rule.⁶³

There were two interrelated developments in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that, taken together, had a significant impact on how the relationship between religion and social peace was imagined. The first of these was a new intolerance of social disorder and violence, combined with a greater confidence in the possibility of pacifying society. The second was a movement away from the traditional notion of peace as a sacral bond of friendship; it was increasingly understood in terms of safety or an absence of physical violence. These two formed the context for a third development: an increased role for the state as the guarantor of peace. Instead of peace being understood as

⁶⁰ Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, pp. 91-169.

⁶¹ Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty: God, State, and Self* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

⁶² Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 441; Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, pp. 149-152.

⁶³ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, ed. Arnold Davidson, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

achieved through the specific practices and rituals of the Church, different variants of Christianity were now judged according to how they contributed to or undermined the peace of the state.

The reforming impulse

The rise of the sovereign state and its challenge to ecclesiastical jurisdiction made the realm of the state rather than the community of the Church into the primary space of peace. This development coincided with a greater confidence in the possibility of a more complete reform of human conduct through the law and associated disciplinary mechanisms, manifested in a series of unprecedented efforts to pacify European populations. These efforts were notable for two reasons. The first was the novel sense that violence and conflict could be eliminated from the social order. The second was the equally novel belief that this could be achieved through an order of law, custom and norm. Christians in previous epochs had been convinced that there were severe limits on the extent to which sin and disorder could be controlled through a political apparatus; Augustine had argued that attempts to restrain sin and vice through force would be ultimately futile no matter how much dedication and effort is expended. The unruly and sinful element would continually threaten to intrude and always resurface, just when one believed one to be in control of the passions or the citizenry.⁶⁴ However, in the sixteenth, and to a greater extent the seventeenth century, there was a greater intolerance of social violence and a greater confidence that sinful human nature could be controlled by force of law. A variety of legal and disciplinary projects were promoted on the basis of this confidence, whose aim Charles Taylor summarises as being ‘to do away with violence and social disorder altogether, leaving only individual crime at one end of the spectrum, and the legitimate violence of the state in war and the repression of crime on the other’.⁶⁵

The motives for this development were various. During the seventeenth century, the reform of society was increasingly viewed as an essential facet of statecraft if a state was to remain competitive in the European balance of military power. As Taylor summarises it, ‘One needed a healthy, numerous, and disciplined population from which to draw good fighting men; one needed a numerous and productive people to get the revenues needed to arm and sustain these men; one needed a sober, ordered and

⁶⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, pp. 71-73, 928 II, 918, [XIX, 927].

⁶⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 119-120.

industrious population to keep production high'.⁶⁶ In the sixteenth century, there was a more defensive motivation behind it. A rise in the numbers of indigent poor was threatening social order through crime, disease and rioting, and attempts were accordingly made to control this mobile, unstable population.

Much of the concern was with order in the commonwealth, but this did not, as yet, mean that peace was 'political' rather than 'religious'. As Cavanaugh notes, sixteenth century Christendom retained the idea that the civil and ecclesiastical powers were different departments of the same body, but reversed the order.⁶⁷ Where medieval Christendom had given precedence to the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the prince now ruled over the Church but temporal power was not imagined as religiously neutral. Both Protestants and Catholics in the sixteenth century were united by the conviction that social cohesion required a common religion, and that one of the main aims of government by temporal rulers must be to uphold 'true religion' and defend the Church of Christ.⁶⁸ True religion was believed to have beneficial social effects through improving standards of behaviour. Sin was still associated with disorder and conflict, and religious conversion was expected to produce an ordered and peaceful life. Thus attempts to discipline the population of early modern states were almost always seamlessly combined with programmes of 'religious' reform, to such an extent that they can only be artificially separated.⁶⁹ In Geneva and Milan, for example, attempts to organise and discipline the poor were combined with efforts to compel attendance in church, hear sermons, learn catechism, eliminate the pagan elements of popular piety, as well as prevent vice of all kinds, from lewdness to dancing.

These efforts were particularly associated with Protestantism, and especially its Calvinist variants, but Catholics of the Counter Reformation could be equally enthusiastic. In the small confessional states that arose in the Holy Roman Empire, for example, the Lutheran, Calvinist and Catholic churches all tightened up their theological and liturgical systems in mutual opposition, whilst intensifying education and pastoral discipline of the conduct of their flocks.⁷⁰ The willingness of temporal rulers to accede to

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 103. See also Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, pp. 285-332.

⁶⁷ Cavanaugh, "'A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House': The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State", p. 401.

⁶⁸ Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 352.

⁶⁹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 104. See also Philip S. Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution: Calvinism and the Rise of the State in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁷⁰ Ian Hunter, 'Uncivil Society: Liberal Government and the Deconfessionalisation of Politics', in Mitchell Dean and Barry Hindess (eds.), *Governing Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Also Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 90-145.

such programmes provided the churches with the opportunity to form closed confessional communities more closely approximating their vision of the true Church, whilst giving temporal rulers with a powerful solution to the problem of governing their populations. Sixteenth century states had yet to develop the necessary bureaucratic structures and disciplinary mechanisms to carry out these reforms and regulate behaviour directly.⁷¹

Christian peace and the early modern social order

The Christian ideal of peace persisted into the sixteenth century, often in its tradition form of a social sacrament of reconciliation. Yet in many places, even where it was ostensibly retained as an ideal, its practical substance was being significantly transformed in a way that extended and deepened the more general turn towards law and hierarchical, centralised authority in the Church. The Protestant Reformation made an important contribution in this direction, but it can be understood as part of a more general impulse shared by Catholics as well to reform lay practice and eliminate its apparently pagan residues. Erasmus, for example, combined a strong affirmation of the traditional goals of Christianity with an equally vigorous denial of the traditional means of attaining them. Christianity still involved reconciliation of man with himself, with other men, and with God, but no longer through sacraments and rituals. Instead, it was to be achieved through eloquent teaching and moral persuasion, combined with a rigorous discipline through which the spirit ruled over the lusts of the flesh.⁷² Peace, by extension, was de-ritualised and de-sacralised. It was now taught rather than exchanged, and was maintained through obedient behaviour in accordance with formal and informal behavioural codes.

Central to this was a redefinition of Christian faith and virtue in terms of obedience to authority.⁷³ The medieval Church had tended to privilege unity through ritual and sacrament over doctrinal orthodoxy – the dangerous element of heresy, for example, was schism rather than heterodoxy. In the early modern era though, authoritative catechisms, creeds, statements of faith, and confessions proliferated on all sides, reducing Christianity to what could be taught and learnt – a set of propositions or a

⁷¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 135-169 especially.

⁷² Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700*, pp. 97-98; O'Donovan and O'Donovan, (eds.), *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought*, pp. 570-580.

⁷³ Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700*, pp. 116-123.

body of doctrine. Reformed catechisms emphasised obedience and deference to parents and civil authorities. The Catholic catechism was described as ‘the commandments of the Church’.⁷⁴ Ethics during the Middle Ages had been a matter of cultivating virtuous forms of behaviour through penance, habit and obedience – admirable attitudes and practices such as love and generosity. The normative reference point was the seven deadly sins, which laid out the attitudes to be avoided, rather than proscribing specific acts. During the early modern period, the Ten Commandments took centre stage as a set of juridical injunctions to be respected. It is notable here that sin came to be identified not with defective human relationships and sympathies, as it had earlier been, but with disobedience to authorities of all kinds – God, Church, king, parents and teachers – and with a failure to control bodily passions.⁷⁵

The peace of Christ, the peace of the heavenly city, was no longer believed to be of this world, and the Church was no longer the locus of peace. Social peace was increasingly understood as safety or the absence of violent conflict rather than a positive bond of friendship, and by the seventeenth century it being equated with public quiet and security.⁷⁶ It was now an order that involved being externally governed, either formally under a code of law, or informally through rule-based ethics, customs and norms. This Christian moral imagination fed into the state-building process. Obedience to a God conceived as the supreme cosmic law-giver fostered among the Christian population attitudes conducive to regulation by a centralised state authority, the sovereign as a mortal God. As Figgis rightly noted, ‘The deity of Calvinism is Hobbes’ *Leviathan*’.⁷⁷ In this regard, Christian standards of piety often fused with the new Renaissance ideal of civility that was having a pacifying influence on the aristocracy during the sixteenth century, and would in later centuries be disseminated among the lower social ranks.⁷⁸

The rise of a more intense personal piety which downplayed the earlier understanding of salvation as inherently social and beginning in the peace of the Church undoubtedly contributed to the differentiation of religion from politics. As Christianity was increasingly defined as a set of speculative beliefs and unilateral ethical actions

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 120.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 134-135.

⁷⁶ Wæver, ‘Peace and Security: Two Concepts and their Relationship’, p. 57.

⁷⁷ John Neville Figgis, *The Divine Right of Kings*, 2nd ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), p. 325. On the parallels between temporal and divine sovereignty in early modern political thought see Elshtain, *Sovereignty: God, State, and Self*; Francis Oakley, ‘Jacobean Political Theology: The Absolute and Ordinary Powers of the King’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* vol. 29, no. 3 (1968); Francis Oakley, ‘The Absolute and Ordained Power of God and King in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Philosophy, Science, Politics, and Law’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* vol. 59, no. 4 (1998); Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*.

⁷⁸ Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700*, pp. 120-121; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 99-112.

pertaining to an other-worldly salvation, it became only indirectly relevant to human political association. Yet the movement towards the civility and security ideal and away from a ritual-based peace was itself implicated in conflict between Catholics and Protestants.⁷⁹ Where the old ideal of peace persisted, as among Catholics in sixteenth century France, the presence of Protestants who denied the sacramental dimension of peace and declined any part in the public rituals associated with it provoked outrage. For Catholics, these rituals were holy, a condition of salvation, and the Protestant refusal was thus construed as a sacrilegious provocation. As Bossy writes, 'Those who sabotaged the ritual by which peace is secured among men are obstructing the community in the fulfilment of its part in a social contract with God, and threatening the eternal damnation of all'.⁸⁰ The French wars of religion were, paradoxically, a conflict over peace to some extent, as the French Catholics sought to defend the ritual, sacral mode against the reduction of peace to freedom from violence. This gave a new sense to Augustine's observation that 'even those who wish to disrupt an existing state of peace do so not because they hate peace, but because they desire the present peace to be exchanged for one of their own choosing'.⁸¹

By this time, though, the major problem of Christianity and peace was no longer how sinful humanity might be reconciled through the Church, but how confessional pluralism could be overcome or managed. Here the solutions proposed took two different directions. The first sought to achieve reconciliation among the confessions directly, through dialogue or a search for a common ground. I shall discuss this path in the next chapter; here it is enough to note that early efforts in this direction in the sixteenth century were unsuccessful. The second solution was to use the increasing power of the state to put an end to the conflict. The principle agreed at Augsburg in 1555 that the ruler should determine the faith of the realm was found to simply result in a zero-sum power struggle at the heart of the state. A more radical solution was therefore countenanced, which involved making civil government wholly indifferent to religious concerns. This move was constitutive of a distinction between religion and politics as separate aspects of life with their own discrete interests.

4.3 Political Science: The State as Peacemaker

⁷⁹ Bossy, 'Holiness and Society', pp. 132-133.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 133.

⁸¹ Augustine, *City of God*, pp. 934 [XIX, 912].

The independence of temporal government from the Church had been developing since the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Politics* and the attempts by late medieval kings and emperors to deny papal pretensions to exercise authority over them. But it was only in the sixteenth century that the first attempts were made to stipulate a right conduct of government whose rationale was distinguished as 'non-religious'. The solution involved a conception of order as imposed from above by a strong centralised state, capable of suppressing conflict among confessional factions. The unity and tranquillity of society was guaranteed by a sovereign lawmaker rather than bonds of kinship and fraternity centred on the Church. Instead of the state being subordinated to the final end of eternal peace, the purpose and end of rule was drawn from the nature of the state itself. The purpose of temporal government was redefined as the preservation of life, not religion.⁸²

An early attempt to extricate the state from confessional feuding was proposed by the *Politiques* in France and the theorists of *raison d'état*. The goal of the state and the task of the governor within it was redefined as that of preservation – the preservation of the ruler and his rule initially, and in later versions the state and its population. This was defined as a non-confessional concern that overrode all more particular confessional concerns, which were lumped together as 'religion'. Thus in 1576 Jean Bodin proposed that the wise prince would recognise that 'the wars made for matters of religion' were not 'grounded upon matters directly touching his estate', the implication being that religious disputes ought to be seen as irrelevant to the essential business of government.⁸³ Rather than suppressing heresy or promoting a particular Christian vision of true human community or salvation, the sovereign should be burdened only with the maintenance of political order. Justus Lipsius, Dutch theorist of *raison d'état*, argued similarly in 1589 that rulers ought to have as their sole aim the promotion of civil peace, sacrificing all other principles for it.⁸⁴

The apparent amorality of reason of state theories were disturbing to some, for they seemed to suggest that legitimate rule derived from the mere fact of power. An explicitly theological account of political power seemed incapable of sustaining social stability, though. There were a series of attempts to undercut religious strife through founding political life in what Charles Taylor describes as an 'independent ethic'.⁸⁵

⁸² James Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 182.

⁸³ Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, p. 254.

⁸⁴ Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572-1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 56-57.

⁸⁵ Taylor, 'Modes of Secularism', pp. 33-34. See also Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, pp. 172-176.

Grotius, for example, like Hobbes and Rousseau after him, began with the *individual* considered in abstraction from all religious or philosophical beliefs that might be held by the observer as to whether the human person is created or purely material, evolved or reincarnated etc.⁸⁶ The observer, it was believed, should also abstract from the birth, status, and eventually gender and race of the individual when theorising. The independent ethic was based on observation of what is left over after the process of abstraction. It deduced from the human condition certain rights, needs and desires said to be natural to human beings *qua* individuals, such as freedom, self-preservation and physical comfort, along with exceptionless norms that should govern their behaviour, such as peace and political obedience. These non-religious, universally available principles would not only guide the construction of a suitable commonwealth, but provide a reason for people to submit to its rule.

This can also be understood as completing the deconfessionalisation of peace and security in two senses. Firstly, it sought to ground politics in a religiously-neutral concept of security. The Augustinian concept of true peace was grounded in a teleological conception of the human person as created for communion with God and with fellow human beings. By beginning with the minimally-conceived individual though, an indisputable and non-confessional account of peace could be constructed. From the seventeenth century until the late-eighteenth century, liberal theorists understood security in terms of freedom for the individual from sudden and aggressive violations of his or her life, property and liberty.⁸⁷ Peace was a condition that pertained between individuals who respected each other's life, freedom and material goods – a condition of non-interference.

Secondly, it sought to realise this concept of peace through a institution that was secular, either in the sense of not backing one confession above others, or the laicist sense of wholly autonomous. As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, the task of the state within liberalism was to provide for individuals the security they cannot provide for themselves. It was to be assured through combining the powers naturally possessed by individuals to protect themselves into a public power capable of ensuring the security of each and all through the mechanism of the law. Security was here a condition and objective of individuals, but one that could only be assured through some kind of

⁸⁶ Milbank, 'The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority', p. 213.

⁸⁷ Rothschild, 'What is Security?' On the history of the concept see also Wæver, 'Peace and Security: Two Concepts and their Relationship'.

collective project.⁸⁸ In the absence of the state and its apparatus of force there could be no peace or security, as the images of the state of nature suggested. It is from this perspective, in which security and order are dependent on a coercive power, that Anthony Gill could recently express his surprise that the Church served as an institution of government when temporal power was weak, before adding that 'What is even more amazing is that the Vatican still commands the loyalty and obedience of hundreds of millions of geographically dispersed people without maintaining a standing army or a police force'.⁸⁹

One could question whether the concept of security was genuinely neutral here though. I have attempted to trace the pre-history of security in medieval understandings of peace to draw out the contrast between a certain Augustinian theological understanding of peace and social order and the modern concept of security that displaced it. We can note that the modern conception of security, in its focus on managing actual or possible threats, bears a strong resemblance to the peace of Rome Augustine had rejected as a false peace. The French Catholics saw the new peace of civility as corrosive of the sacramental peace of the Church.

It could be objected that Augustine and the French Catholics were reacting to what they perceived as alternative religious visions of peace, whereas the modern concept of security is genuinely secular, basic to all human beings. However, the notion that an independent political ethic can be founded in the idea of 'the individual' has recently been questioned by writers associated with the Radical Orthodoxy movement in theology, who doubt the possibility of an entirely neutral account of the human person from which to begin theorising. John Milbank writes that 'Liberalism is peculiar and unlikely because it proceeds by inventing a wholly artificial human being who has never really existed, and then pretending that we are all instances of such a species'.⁹⁰ Worse still, he argues, liberalism's imagination of the individual as a being that is essentially the possessor of a free will betrays the fact that 'the individual' was made in the image of God, but God as he was described by late medieval voluntarist theology.⁹¹

William Cavanaugh is equally critical of the individual as a starting point for political reflection. He argues that the individualist anthropology of liberalism privileges a different conception of human relations: 'The recognition of our participation in one

⁸⁸ Rothschild, 'What is Security?'

⁸⁹ Anthony Gill, 'Religion and Comparative Politics', *Annual Review of Political Science* vol. 4 (2001), p. 118.

⁹⁰ Milbank, 'The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority', p. 213.

⁹¹ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, pp. 9-25.

another through our creation in the image of God is replaced by the recognition of the other as the bearer of individual rights, which may or many not be given by God, but which serve only to separate what is mine from what is thine'.⁹² There can be no 'truly social process' by beginning with an anthropology in which individuals are formally equal yet guided by no common ends, because the state can only hope to keep these individuals from interfering with each other's rights.⁹³ Both Milbank and Cavanaugh insist that human beings can only be properly understood as creatures rather than individuals. In other words, to abstract from its created nature and the *telos* that comes with it is to provide a distorted rather than a minimal or lowest common denominator account of humanity.

The corollary of this for accounts of security founded in the preservation of the individual is an echo of the communitarian critique of liberalism: while it claims to stand above the fray of competing visions of the good, merely providing the formal conditions for their realisation, it is itself just another particular account of the good. In Cavanaugh's terms, it is an alternative soteriology that promises peace through the state rather than the Church, albeit a limited and partial peace. Significantly for my purposes here, it is a peace whose maintenance has warranted particular political strategies of containment in relation to religion – strategies that have shaped how religion is conceptualised.

Governing religion

Enjoying social peace, or being secure, was now a matter of being a citizen rather than a member of the Church. Peace was a responsibility of the public authorities rather than a bond fostered directly between people within and between communities. Nevertheless, this did not mean that religion was altogether irrelevant to the state, for Rousseau's comment that 'no state has ever been founded without religion at its base' summarises the conventional wisdom of the seventeenth century.⁹⁴ Religion was still generally regarded as the foundation of obedience, cohesion and stability in a state. Bodin wrote that 'there is nothing which doth more uphold and maintain the states and Commonwealths than religion', proposing that it 'is the principal foundation of the power and strength of monarchies and Seignories as also for the execution of justice, for the

⁹² Cavanaugh, 'The City: Beyond Secular Parodies', pp. 192-193.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 193.

⁹⁴ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, p. 180.

obedience of the subjects, the reverence of the magistrates, for the fear of doing evil, and for the mutual love and amity of every one towards other'.⁹⁵

As David Wootton has shown, there was a new stress on fear of God as a necessary prop to social order during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁹⁶ Even the tolerant Locke regarded atheists as a threat to society because they had no reason to uphold promises, covenants and oaths.⁹⁷ Unbelief was profoundly threatening because fear of the law was regarded as the chief bond of society and the guarantor of security. Because society was founded in an original contract, and held together by promises and oaths, it was fear of God and the hangman on which social stability was founded. While one might hope to escape judgement in this world, one was bound to face it in the next. Atheists were those who denied God's justice rather than God's existence, and hence denied the reality of divine justice in this world or the next.⁹⁸

There had to be some kind of religion, but now it did not matter which kind. Specifically, it did not matter from a political perspective whether it was true or not. For the reason of state theorists, as for Hobbes later on, the fact of religion – understood as belief in a deity with powers to punish and reward – was more important than the form this religion took. The sovereign had no duty to uphold true religion, but simply to keep the peace, and to this end even a false religion was better than no religion.⁹⁹ This did not mean that anything goes, however. There had to be religion and it did not matter if it was true, but it was important that it should not be the kind of religion that was harmful to civil interests.

First of all, the religious life of a population should not actively undermine the peace of the state. Religious uniformity was preferred for this reason until the late seventeenth century. Thus the Catholic League in late sixteenth-century France regarded Protestants as non-French as well as theologically deviant, and took as their slogan 'un roi, une loi, une foi' (one King, one law, one faith).¹⁰⁰ The Swedish statesman Axel Oxenstierna declaring in the seventeenth century that people must have the same 'religion' if they are to maintain society with each other, by which he meant affirming a

⁹⁵ Quoted in Stephen Holmes, *Passions and Constraint: On the Theory of Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 121.

⁹⁶ David Wootton, 'The Fear of God in Early Modern Political Theory', *Communications Historiques* vol. 18, no. 1 (1983).

⁹⁷ Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, p. 51.

⁹⁸ Wootton, 'The Fear of God in Early Modern Political Theory'. See also Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts*, pp. 208-210.

⁹⁹ Holmes, *Passions and Constraint*, p. 122; Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, p. 325.

¹⁰⁰ Mack P. Holt, 'Putting Religion Back into the Wars of Religion', *French Historical Studies* vol. 18, no. 2 (1993), p. 549; Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 49-51.

common set of beliefs.¹⁰¹ Lipsius also advised that 'One religion is the author of unitie; and from a confused religion there alwayes groweth dissention'. The younger Locke believed that it was unlikely in a religiously pluralistic society that the various sects would 'quietly unite...under the same government and unanimously carry the same civill interest and hand in hand march to the same end of peace and mutuall society though they take different ways to heaven'.¹⁰² Hobbes similarly regarded doctrines that caused subjects to divide into rival and mutually-hostile confessional factions as dangerous.¹⁰³

Hobbes' emphasis on doctrines here illustrates another commonplace of the era: the idea that religious disorder was the product of disruptive beliefs. Dangerous opinions were those that were politically subversive, such as the belief that we should obey God rather than man, which encouraged disobedience to the sovereign.¹⁰⁴ In what was a fairly conventional analysis of his time, Locke argued that the religious wars had been caused by two calamitous beliefs: that there is only one right way to worship God, and that the Christian had a duty to protect and spread the true faith by force of arms.¹⁰⁵ These false beliefs had been introduced into Christianity by priests in order to increase their power. In addition, the teaching that civil authority is bestowed by the Church and that the pious should have a special authority in civil concerns were also dangerous. On the basis of his juridical understanding of the social bond he also denounced those who taught that it was legitimate to break promises to heretics. A century later, Adam Smith still regarded the public peace and the security of the sovereign as vulnerable to subversive teachings from the pulpit.¹⁰⁶

With the rise of the state as peacemaker and a greater confidence in the ability to reform and control human conduct through the law, the relationship between religion and security or peace was now regarded as being dependent on the attitudes and actions of two constituencies. Firstly, it depended on the willingness of zealous partisans to submit to the law and remain loyal to the sovereign. Secondly, though, it became equally dependent, if not more, on the policies and actions of those who wielded power in the state. This made the issue of violence and religion a problem of the government of the

¹⁰¹ Bossy, 'Holiness and Society', p. 134.

¹⁰² Quoted in Richard Tuck, 'Scepticism and Toleration in the Seventeenth Century', in Susan Mendus (ed.), *Justifying Toleration: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 33.

¹⁰³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 174-175 [ch. 129].

¹⁰⁴ Edward Curley, 'Hobbes and the Cause of Religious Toleration', in Patricia Springborg (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 310; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 125 [ch. 122].

¹⁰⁵ Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts*, p. 209.

¹⁰⁶ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations: Books IV-V*, p. 386.

state. For many in the seventeenth century, the presence of dangerous and divisive opinions meant that religion had to be governed, at least in its externalities.

Government, following Foucault, can be described as “the conduct of conduct”: that is to say, a form of activity aiming to shape, guide or affect the conduct of some person or persons’.¹⁰⁷ It refers to any calculated direction of human conduct.¹⁰⁸ Foucault has argued that government of the state came to be understood during the early modern period as an ‘art’ that would only be successful if it followed rules and principles intrinsic to the work of governing a community. While the state should still follow divine or natural laws in its actions, its government was no longer understood as being about realising a measure of divine justice or cultivating virtue. Its purpose was now the preservation of itself and its population, and the increase of this power and strength through ensuring the peace, health and wealth of its inhabitants. Its principle instrument for the shaping of conduct to this end was its juridical apparatus: the law-maker, the laws, the rewards and punishments of the penal system and the codes of legal and illegal acts.¹⁰⁹

For Lipsius, Hobbes and the younger Locke, the sovereign had the right and duty to impose uniformity.¹¹⁰ Beyond this, potentially dangerous opinions must be discouraged or forbidden, Hobbes insisted, because ‘the Actions of men proceed from their Opinions; and in the well governing of Opinions, consisteth the well governing of mens Actions, in order to their Peace, and Concord’.¹¹¹ Hobbes famously reserved to the sovereign considerable powers in the control of public religion, a right derived from the sovereign’s duty to preserve his subjects. Indeed, his chief purpose in writing *Leviathan* was to suggest that the sovereign is himself the arbiter of correct religion according to what is most conducive to civil peace.¹¹² The Church was subsumed by Hobbes into a state that could impose a public religious settlement, proscribing expression of opinions in religion that were dangerous to the peace and order of society. The sovereign could define what could acceptably be taught,¹¹³ which books of scripture were canonical, how they should be interpreted, and give their teachings the force of law.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁷ Colin Gordon, ‘Governmental Rationality: An Introduction’, in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: SAGE Publications, 1999), p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts*, p. 209.

¹¹⁰ Tuck, ‘Scepticism and Toleration in the Seventeenth Century’, p. 26.

¹¹¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 93 [ch 18].

¹¹² Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, p. 325.

¹¹³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 93, 293 [ch. 218, 242].

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 202–210 [ch. 233].

Hobbes thus advocated extensive powers of regulation for religion, powers that were unpalatable to many in the Church. And yet he argued that they could be no threat to true religion because ‘Doctrine repugnant to Peace, can no more be True, than Peace and Concord can be against the Law of Nature’.¹¹⁵ True religion will never come into conflict with the sovereign – and that which the sovereign must prohibit cannot therefore be true religion. Indeed, it could not even be religion at all. Hobbes’ contrasted religion with superstition, but the distinction had nothing to do with the truth of either. Religion was a fear of invisible power that was conjured up by doctrines that could publicly be taught, whereas superstition was fear generated by prohibited doctrines.¹¹⁶ The sovereign decided what could count as religion – there could be no such thing as illegal religion. Here we see a forerunner of the modern governmental practice of insisting that anything considered threatening to the state or even just undesirable is either not really religion, or a distorted form of religion.

The imposition of particular beliefs was considered legitimate because it was designed to further the neutral, secular peace. As Richard Tuck has concluded, many of those who wrote on toleration in the seventeenth century ‘would have agreed that there are not, and could not be, grounds for enforcing one’s own beliefs upon another *simply because of the nature of those beliefs*; but beliefs *could* be enforced upon unwilling subjects for pragmatic or political reasons’.¹¹⁷ Beliefs could still be imposed if they usefully served the purpose of civil peace, but not on the grounds that they were believed to be true. Civil government retained a concern with the religious life of the population, but the rationale for this concern had changed in accordance with the new standpoint from which it issued. Political rule had previously been understood within a broader Christian view of the nature and proper end of human association, which provided a standard for evaluating the worth of all particular manifestations of rule. Now the situation was reversed: every expression of Christianity, as religion, could be judged according to what was now a political goal of keeping the peace. In the same manner, Rousseau in the mid-eighteenth century would evaluate the defects of different kinds of religion ‘from the political point of view’, meaning in terms of their utility to the strength and stability of the community.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 26 [ch. 26].

¹¹⁶ Tuck, ‘Scepticism and Toleration in the Seventeenth Century’, p. 35.

¹¹⁷ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, pp. 176-187, quote at 181. Italics in original.

¹¹⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 57 [ch. 12].

4.4 The Differentiation of Religion

The rise of the state as a neutral peacemaker enforcing a secular peace involved the introduction of an implicit distinction between a this-worldly interest in civil order and the other-worldly interest in the salvation of souls. If accepted, this had implications for the scope of legitimate state power in relation to the Church, but it also had broader implications for the conceptualisation of religion. Defining a non-confessional political sphere animated by its own distinctive concerns involved an implicit differentiation of politics from religion, with the accompanying insinuation that what was separate should be kept separate. Describing religion in opposition to a political sphere concerned with material wellbeing and security would in turn privilege particular ways of characterising the purpose and nature of religion – specifically, it comes to be defined as a wholly interior matter only secondarily expressed through outward actions.

Hobbes: a half-way house on the road to differentiation

Locke would bring this tendency to fruition later in the seventeenth century, but we can find the kernel of such a distinction in Hobbes' *Leviathan*. This might seem an odd claim at first glance, given Hobbes' enthusiasm for uniting temporal and spiritual power and handing over control of doctrine and liturgy to the sovereign. But we should note that the religion dictated by the sovereign was a civil religion, of external ceremonies and public exposition and scriptural interpretation. This was only one dimension of religion though. The other was made up of 'opinions concerning the nature of Powers Invisible'. Civil religion was built upon this foundation, cultivated from this seed, as Hobbes put it, by human beings.¹¹⁹ There were many different types of civil religion, but all of them existed for the sake of social order and peace. They had been promulgated by two sorts of men; those who were guided by their own powers of invention, and those who were directed and commanded by God. However: 'both sorts have done it, with a purpose to make those men that relyed on them, the more apt to Obedience, Lawes, Peace, Charity, and civill Society'.¹²⁰

Civil religion subject to the sovereign is not differentiated from politics. Hobbes explicitly states that the devotions invented by men are part of heathen politics, whereas

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 57, 59 [ch. 12].

those developed from genuine divine revelation are part of Christian politics.¹²¹ Yet the rule of law, he argued, should extend to actions only, and not into the inward thoughts and consciences of men. He consistently applied this with regard to religion, proposing that it should only be regulated in its externals, that is, in the words and actions that are its public dimension. The sovereign retained the right to regulate outward professions of religion for the sake of security, but he should not care what his subjects privately affirm as long as they comport themselves unseditiously.¹²²

Citizens should not be concerned about what ceremonies the sovereign institutes and they commit no sin by participating in them, because they do not make any difference to true faith, which resides in the heart. Thus Hobbes could instruct Christians living under heathen regimes to obey their rulers, even to the point of outwardly renouncing their faith and joining in foreign rituals, because true faith in Christ was wholly interior and could not be harmed or affected by external practices.¹²³ The individual was thus left with a private space within which they could entertain their own opinions about the nature of God as conscience demanded, and this is all that is really necessary. The implicit argument here was that the essence of religion was both private and otherworldly, irrelevant to the public sphere in its specifically confessional variants. Religion was thus made a matter of individual preference, a subjective choice to be protected, both from other people and from the state.

One difference between Hobbes and Locke was a greater emphasis on toleration, and a more formal criterion for distinguishing between what belonged to each sphere. Hobbes, it has been suggested, was not as intolerant as he has been given credit for. He insisted, for example, that the function of the sovereign was to protect his subjects and himself from destruction, rather than enforcing anything upon them that could not be sincerely interpreted as a means to their preservation.¹²⁴ Religion should not be restricted any more than was necessary for the good of the commonwealth, for liberty, including religious liberty, was an aspect of what Hobbes referred to as 'commodity of living'.¹²⁵ The purpose of the laws is not to prevent people from any kind of free action, 'but to direct and keep them in such a motion, as not to hurt themselves by their own impetuous desires, rashness or indiscretion; as Hedges are set, not to stop Travellers, but to keep

¹²¹ Ibid., pp. 254, 283-284, 374 [ch. 240, 242].

¹²² Also see Curley, 'Hobbes and the Cause of Religious Toleration'.

¹²³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 270 [ch.242].

¹²⁴ Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, p. 333 [ch. 344].

¹²⁵ Curley, 'Hobbes and the Cause of Religious Toleration', p. 311.

them in the way'.¹²⁶ A good law is therefore a law that is necessary for the good of the people, and where the law is silent the subject can do as he pleases.¹²⁷ As Taylor points out, implicit in Hobbes argument is that the wise sovereign will allow his subjects a considerable measure of freedom in private practice.¹²⁸ Protecting a certain amount of religious freedom was prudent, Hobbes suggested, because excessive repression beyond what was necessary for the good of the state was likely to be counter-productive, generating violent opposition.¹²⁹

Furthermore, Hobbes certainly regarded religious uniformity as a precondition of civil peace and this was bound to result in a certain degree of intolerance. The expansion of toleration required the abandonment of religious uniformity as an ideal. This development was more closely connected with the belief that uniformity no longer served civil peace than with the invocation of the ideal of freedom. There was little enthusiasm for religious liberty as a positive moral value in the early modern period. But for some, such as the *Politiques* faction in France, the preference for uniformity was pragmatic rather than absolute. Civil peace should be prioritised over doctrinal orthodoxy, and toleration should be conceded – at least as a short term measure – where peace could not be secured through the imposition of uniformity.¹³⁰ Bodin, associated with the *Politique* programme, commended the toleration of Huguenots if the alternative was civil war.¹³¹ Montaigne reflected that giving free reign to religious dissent may give dangerous opportunities to those bent on scattering contention and division, 'But on the other side, it might also be urged, that to give factions the bridle to uphold their opinion, is by that facilitie and ease, the readie way to mollifie and release them; and to blunt the edge, which is sharpened by rarenesse, noveltie and difficultie'.¹³² Despite Lipsius's preference for religious uniformity, he advised that where repression was politically impossible, toleration was the more prudent and justifiable strategy, lest 'a suddaine constraint will bring more damage than profit to the commonwealth'.¹³³ The health and welfare of the state should be the principle thing respected by the law, and so good order must be given priority over religious uniformity where they were in conflict.¹³⁴

¹²⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 185 [ch. 130].

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 115 [ch. 121].

¹²⁸ Taylor, 'Modes of Secularism', p. 34.

¹²⁹ Curley, 'Hobbes and the Cause of Religious Toleration', p. 311.

¹³⁰ Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, pp. 249-253.

¹³¹ Holmes, *Passions and Constraint*, p. 121.

¹³² Quoted in Tuck, 'Scepticism and Toleration in the Seventeenth Century', p. 27.

¹³³ Quoted in Ibid., p. 26.

¹³⁴ Holmes, *Passions and Constraint*, pp. 120-125; Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, pp. 253-254; Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, pp. 56-59.

Freedom of religion was not, for these writers, a matter of high principle, but of what was most conducive to the security of the realm. In the writings of Montaigne and Lipsius, Tuck insists, ‘the question of toleration is a *pragmatic* one, to be resolved in accordance with particular social circumstances and the general principle of the priority of civil peace’.¹³⁵ The implication of this standpoint is the autonomy of religion from state control depended upon what is considered necessary or prudent for security in particular circumstances. Any boundaries that do exist in practice limiting the power of the state in the conduct of religion are improvised by the sovereign according to circumstances. Tuck follows this argument through the work of Grotius, Hobbes and Locke, arguing in each case that the extent to which religion should be excluded from the political concern of the state is governed by the same principle as that which justifies its regulation and restriction.¹³⁶

Locke: civil government and religion as separate spheres

During the seventeenth century, the paradigm of good government by the civil authorities gradually shifted from one in which the close regulation of religion was necessary for peace to one in which religious freedom was the guarantor of peace. Within the earlier, more absolutist versions of the modern political ideal, detailed regulation of the externals of religion was the order of the day. Hobbes made the power to draw boundaries between the public civil religion and the realm of private freedom a matter for sovereign discretion, taking it for granted that this power would be properly used, as did the younger Locke.

With the rise of more liberal accounts of politics, the model of pragmatic toleration hardened into a general injunction: religious freedom, it was insisted, was more likely to produce stable and peaceful societies. A second innovation was the attempt to demarcate more clearly the boundaries between religion and politics and prevent incursions from either side, born not only of a suspicion of ‘enthusiasm’ but also now a more sceptical attitude towards those public authorities entrusted with enforcing the peace. In his later work *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, Locke did not share the confidence of Hobbes or his younger self that the sovereign could be trusted to perform the function with a pure concern for civil peace. The ranks of zealots and enthusiasts could not be trusted with liberty of conscience lest under pretence of religion they abusively

¹³⁵ Tuck, ‘Scepticism and Toleration in the Seventeenth Century’, p. 27. Italics in original.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 29-35.

claimed exemptions from all quarters of the law for their self-interested behaviour; the magistrate, however, was equally liable to clothe a persecuting spirit in the garb of peace and the common good. Locke feared that unverifiable religious claims of conscience functioned as a cover for popular anarchy, but also that the language of civil order could be abused for confessional ends with dangerous consequences for domestic peace.¹³⁷

He sought to remedy this problem by providing a more developed account of the differences between politics and religion, and the concerns proper to each. Thus in the *Letter* we find a clear statement defining the boundaries between the political realm subject to force and violence, and the religious realm of persuasion and tolerance. The need to draw lines, to establish spheres of appropriate activity, is justified by Locke as being a precondition of peace:

I esteem it above all things necessary to distinguish exactly the Business of Civil Government from that of Religion, and to settle the just Bounds that lie between the one and the other. If this be not done, there can be no end put to the Controversies that will always be arising, between those that have, or at least pretend to have, on the one side, a Concernment for the Interest of Mens Souls, and on the other side, a Care of the Commonwealth.¹³⁸

The boundary between religion and civil affairs, church and commonwealth, are no longer pragmatically determined at the whim of the sovereign, but are codified as inscribed in the very order of things. It is now represented as ‘fixed and immovable’, differentiating wholly different dimensions of life.¹³⁹ As Locke puts it, ‘He jumbles Heaven and Earth together, the things most remote and opposite, who mixes these two Societies; which are in their Original, End, Business, and in every other thing, perfectly distinct, and infinitely different from each other’.¹⁴⁰

Having announced his intent, Locke proceeded to specify what was political and what was religious in terms of how and to what ends each sphere might legitimately be governed. Civil government has as its object the procuring, preserving and advancement of civil interests. He defined these interests in terms we have already encountered,

¹³⁷ Kirstie McClure, 'Difference, Diversity, and the Limits of Toleration', *Political Theory* vol. 18, no. 3 (1990), pp. 376-377.

¹³⁸ Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, p. 26.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

namely, the security of life, individual freedom and possession of material goods.¹⁴¹ The business of religion, by contrast, is ‘the publick worshipping of God, in such a manner as they judge acceptable to him, and effectual to the Salvation of their Souls’.¹⁴² Political government finds its end in the things of this world, seeking to regulate actions and preserve the body. The end of religious government lies in the world to come; it seeks to regulate opinions and save the soul.

Religion and politics thus became compartmentalised spheres in with their own specific goods. This logic extended to the level of individual lives the liberal logic of society. A liberal polity is not united by a shared conception of the good according to which the life of the community is ordered. It is made up of an aggregate of individuals pursuing a range of goods dictated by their personal preferences. The extension of this is that there is no one overriding good that unites the disparate activities of an individual human life. The aims of the psychologically healthy individual are also conceived by liberals as heterogeneous rather than subordinate to and directed towards an overarching good.¹⁴³ Thus the goods of politics and the goods of religion were fundamentally different, for Locke. As these spheres multiplied, so did the variety of groups and social relationships through which liberal individual expresses his preferences.

A contemporary version of this is Amartya Sen’s insistence that treating religion as a pre-eminent identity is a distortion that fails to do justice to the variety of identities and social allegiances through which human beings live out their lives.¹⁴⁴ ‘Religion is not, and cannot be, a person’s all encompassing identity’, he has argued.¹⁴⁵ This is because a religion-based classification of people ‘reduces many-sided human beings into one dimension each and muzzles the variety of involvements that have provided rich and diverse grounds for cross-border interactions over many centuries, including the arts, literature, science, mathematics, games, trade, politics, and other arenas of shared human interest’.¹⁴⁶ Sen rightly criticises crude, single-category ascriptions of identity, but the alternative he presents is equally misleading, for he represents different identities as constituted in isolation from one another. Identity is taken to be as a matter of multiple affiliations which exist side by side, self-sufficiently, from which the individual is able to

¹⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 26, 47.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁴³ MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, pp. 336-337.

¹⁴⁴ Sen, *Identity and Violence*.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

stand back to decide upon their relative significance depending on the context.¹⁴⁷ For example, an individual might have an Islamic identity, but there are other identities and loyalties based on scientific interests, political commitment, familial loyalties or literary pursuits that may also be significant for that person, rendering their religious identity just one among a broad variety of commitments.¹⁴⁸

This may be an accurate description of how many people, including liberal Muslims, manage their multiple commitments, but it is not an accurate description of how people always are, as Sen argues. A possibility he does not discuss is that the discourses associated with some identities provide the categories and norms through which other identities are constructed, along with the meaning and purpose of the practices associated with them. In other words, what it means to be a good father and what counts as a desirable political goal may be informed by one's Muslim identity. Political commitments and conceptions of fatherhood may derive from one's Islamic identity. This possibility is not considered by Sen, because he conceives identities in liberal terms as referring an individual to essentially separate spheres of life, with their own 'proper domains'.¹⁴⁹ Treating religion as a primary identity is bound to be regarded as impoverished from this perspective, because religion has been defined in advance as dealing with a very narrow range of concerns. The problem here is that Sen equates the human self with the liberal self, making the unwarranted assumption that this is how people's affiliations are naturally structured.¹⁵⁰ More concerning is the implication that follows here: that those for whom multiple aspects of life are informed by a theological sensibility appear misguided or even deviant.

According to Locke, not only are the spheres heterogeneous in their purposes, the methods appropriate to each are different as well. The political sphere – what Locke characteristically referred to as civil society or the commonwealth – is the sphere of coercion. The magistrate prescribes by law and compels by punishment, armed with the force and strength of all his subjects. It is necessarily so, for 'no Man does willingly suffer himself to be punished by the Deprivation of any part of his Goods, and much less of his Liberty or Life'.¹⁵¹ Coercion is out place in the realm of religion however, for 'true and saving Religion consists in the inward perswasion of the Mind...It is only light and

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 18-39.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 59-83.

¹⁴⁹ This is a phrase he uses several times about religion, e.g. Ibid., pp. 75, 83.

¹⁵⁰ In this regard, Sen's book confirms Alasdair MacIntyre's observation that assuming the universality of the liberal self with its plural goods is entirely typical of the liberal tradition. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 337.

¹⁵¹ Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, p. 26.

Evidence that can work a change in Mens opinions; which Light can in no manner proceed from corporal Sufferings, or any other outward Penalties'.¹⁵² Churches are wholly voluntary organisations, and ecclesiastical laws must be 'destitute of all Compulsive Power'. Those with responsibility for discipline within churches could resort only to 'Exhortations, Admonitions and Advices', for force belonged wholly to the civil power.¹⁵³

Locke's account of differentiation authorised a discourse of government, or rather, a plurality of discourses in which the purpose, character and limits of government were defined in relation to each sphere. The business and methods of civil and religious government were wholly different, and under no circumstances were those entrusted with each activity permitted to overstep their remits. The civil authorities had no business meddling in the care of souls, and neither should churches, or private persons acting under pretence of religion, attempt to interfere with each other's civil rights to life, freedom and property. This would become a characteristic liberal position. Adam Smith similarly argued that 'Articles of faith, as well as other spiritual matters, it is evident enough, are not within the proper department of a temporal sovereign, who, though he may be very well qualified for protecting, is seldom supposed to be so for instructing the people'.¹⁵⁴

This corresponded to a liberal preference for limited government that exercises restraint in relation to various aspects of life, insulating them from unwarranted coercive interference.¹⁵⁵ This has often been advocated as a moral good – the protection of freedom. Locke was concerned that giving the magistrate discretionary power to define the boundary between what was religious and what was political risked abuse of power. A more definite boundary had to be drawn, and this was the empirical principle of harm. As Foucault has argued, however, freedom itself finds a further justification within liberal governmental thought as being necessary for the achievement of liberal governmental objectives.¹⁵⁶ Excessive attempts to use the expanded administrative and disciplinary capabilities of the state to regulate all aspects of life would be counter-productive, liberals argued, whatever the moral problems that were also involved. If we take security to be one of those liberal objectives, we can see this governmental discourse taking shape in arguments about the utility of toleration. Security concerns could justify extensive

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁵⁴ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations: Books IV-V*, p. 386.

¹⁵⁵ Walzer, 'Liberalism and the Art of Separation'.

¹⁵⁶ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

regulation of liturgy and doctrine, but they cut both ways and could equally justify a *laissez-faire* approach.

This is evident in Locke's warning of the calamity that results from any confusion of the spheres of religion and politics. He reiterated that religion can provide no justification for interfering with the civil interests of others by private individuals or churches, that religious ends should not be pursued by compulsion. 'Those that are of another Opinion', he continued, 'would do well to consider with themselves how pernicious a Seed of Discord and War, how powerful a provocation to endless Hatreds, Rapines and Slaughters, they thereby furnish unto Mankind. No Peace and Security, no not so much as Common Friendship, can ever be established and preserved among Men, so long as this Opinion prevails, That *Dominion is founded in Grace*, and that Religion is to be propagated by force of Arms'.¹⁵⁷

Religion becomes a threat to peace when the rightful boundaries of politics and religion are not respected. Thus Locke challenged the view that Christianity itself could be held responsible for the tumults and civil wars of the preceding century. Christianity is the most modest and peaceful religion imaginable and therefore, he proposed, there must be another explanation for the Wars of Religion:

It is not the diversity of Opinions (which cannot be avoided) but the refusal of Toleration to those that are of different Opinions, (which might have been granted) that has produced all the Bustles and Wars, that have been in the Christian World, upon account of Religion. The Heads and Leaders of the Church, moved by Avarice and insatiable desire of Dominion, making use of the immoderate Ambition of the Magistrates, and the credulous superstition of the giddy Multitude, have incensed and animated them against those that dissent from themselves; by preaching unto them that, contrary to the Laws of the Gospel and the Precepts of Charity, That Schismatics and Hereticks are to be outed of their possessions, and Destroyed. And thus have they mixed together and confounded two things that are in themselves most different, the Church and the Commonwealth.¹⁵⁸

It is not Christianity itself, or the presence of different beliefs, but the failure to adequately differentiate politics and religion as separate spheres of life that was to blame for the Wars of Religion. Locke was attempting to carve out a sphere of activity

¹⁵⁷ Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, p. 33.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

concerned specifically with the political association of men and to seal off this realm, including its characteristic apparatus of the law, from religious influence and use as a necessary precondition of security.

Locke's earlier judgement about the necessity of a imposed religious settlement had been based on an observation about the destructive nature of the competitive drive that plagued modern churches. False ideas about the necessity of correcting heresy by force were deeply entrenched, immune to any appeal to reason, he believed; the imposition of uniformity by the magistrate was the only solution. His later argument that the state should refrain from interfering in religion was grounded in a more sceptical assessment of the effectiveness of state coercion as an instrument of religious peace. In *A Letter Concerning Toleration* it is the impossibility of forcing believers to abandon beliefs and ceremonies they took to be necessary for their salvation that supports the proposal that believers should be left alone. For 'such is the nature of the Understanding, that it cannot be compell'd to the belief of any thing by outward force'.¹⁵⁹ Attempts to impose uniformity on sincere believers were not only futile but likely, Locke averred, to provoke more civil strife than a policy of toleration.¹⁶⁰

The persistence of this mode of thought can be seen in the more recent argument that Western states, and the United States in particular, should take more seriously its commitment to promoting religious freedom around the world. They have been recommended to put freedom of religion at the heart of foreign policy rather than simply intervening in particular cases to prevent persecution and human rights abuses.¹⁶¹ The International Crisis Group, a prominent international non-governmental organisation, has urged states to 'Treat religious freedom as a security issue, not just a human rights issue, and advocate unequivocally that regional security can only be assured if religious freedom is guaranteed and legitimate activities of groups and individuals are not suppressed'.¹⁶² The argument here is that a restriction of freedom by a state or a religious 'monopoly' backed by a state will inevitably provoke a backlash and undermine domestic security, whereas unrestricted religion contributes positively to social stability and democratic culture (a theme that is itself linked with security through the democratic peace discourse).

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁶⁰ Tuck, 'Scepticism and Toleration in the Seventeenth Century', p. 34.

¹⁶¹ Farr, 'Diplomacy in an Age of Faith: Religious Freedom and National Security'; Robert A. Seiple, 'A Lively Experiment, A Most Flourishing Civil State', in Robert A. Seiple and Dennis Hoover (eds.), *Religion and Security: The New Nexus in International Relations* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

¹⁶² International Crisis Group, 'Islamist Mobilisation and Regional Security' (Osh/Brussels: 2001), p. v.

Politics and religion were not entirely stable categories here though, for despite Locke's claim that the boundary between them was fixed and immoveable, in practice it depended, as it had for Hobbes, on the judgement of the sovereign as to what was necessary for the maintenance of peace in particular circumstances. Nothing that was lawful in the ordinary course of life could be prohibited as a religious practice, Locke insisted, but if any such practice had a bearing on the public interest of the commonwealth, it became a political rather than a religious matter, and could quite legitimately be legislated on. He gave the example of the slaughter of a cow: in normal circumstances this was permissible for a feast or for a sacrifice equally, but if the interest of the state required that all cattle-slaughtering should be suspended to increase stock following 'some extraordinary Murrain', the sacrifice of cattle could be included in this ban.¹⁶³

A similar standard functioned in relation to belief. Speculative beliefs that had no effect on outward actions should be outside the scope of the law and therefore non-political.¹⁶⁴ In contrast to speculative opinions, practical beliefs – those which influence the will and manners – could be injurious to civil interests, and so there was a certain amount of shifting of the boundaries possible here between what was political and what was religious. Opinions that threatened the preservation of political society were not to be tolerated by the magistrate.¹⁶⁵

The criteria in both cases was one of harm, or worldly injury. But what would count as undermining the peace of the commonwealth? I have already noted the variability in the concept of social peace, and the way in which different conceptions were implicated in confessional conflict in the sixteenth century. Judgements were likely to differ, and there was a need for some common standard by which such disagreements can be regulated. The absence of a common judge was the problem responsible for human relations degenerating into violence in Locke's state of nature.¹⁶⁶ Hobbes solution was to subordinate all particular judgements to that of the sovereign, but by what standard was the sovereign to judge?

Locke suspected that rulers would be just as susceptible to the temptations of confessional partiality and prejudice as ordinary citizens. His solution was to propose that a matter became political – that is, falling within the remit of the civil powers – only if

¹⁶³ Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, p. 42.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁶⁶ Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, pp. 350-353 [II, 123-131].

there were discernable worldly effects that could be referred to as evidence of harm. The criterion here rested on an empiricist epistemology, the assumption being that the consequences of certain acts can be observed and known with confidence.¹⁶⁷ Civil knowledge is regarded as objective and certain, whereas religious knowledge, by contrast, was inherently uncertain and unverifiable. The epistemological standard fixed the boundaries in particular cases, circumscribing the limits of public political and private religious discourse, constraining the actions of both ecclesial and civil authorities. On the one hand, disapproval of alternative forms of worship would no longer suffice as a justification of force in the absence of any observable this-worldly consequences. On the other hand, it also prevented any attempt to use coercion for confessional reasons by those who wielded it otherwise legitimately on behalf of the state.

Religion was defined in terms that render it resolutely non-political. It is a private matter concerned with inward dispositions rather than outward actions, whose purpose is 'the regulating of Mens Lives according to the Rules of Vertue and Piety'.¹⁶⁸ John Stuart Mill would later express the same idea when he wrote that morality was an expression of religion rather than religion itself, which was an interior state.

Outward good works (the utmost meaning usually suggested by the word morality) are only a part, and are indeed rather the fruits of the religion rather than the religion itself. The essence of religion is the strong and earnest direction of the emotions and desires towards an ideal object, recognized as of the highest excellence, and as rightfully paramount over all selfish objects of desire.¹⁶⁹

As Locke had done, Mill was here denying that the external actions that might be motivated by religion were a part of religion properly considered. The distinction between the speculative and the practical dimensions of religion, and the assumption that it is speculative articles of faith that lie at the heart of true religion, can still be detected in contemporary theorising on religion and international politics. Fox and Sandler, for example, reproduce this way of thinking when they distinguish between what religion is and what religion does.¹⁷⁰ They assume that human behaviour is essentially secondary to

¹⁶⁷ McClure, 'Difference, Diversity, and the Limits of Toleration', pp. 376-378.

¹⁶⁸ Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, p. 23.

¹⁶⁹ John Stuart Mill, *Three Essays on Religion: Nature, The Utility of Religion, Theism* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998), p. 109.

¹⁷⁰ Fox and Sandler, *Bringing Religion into International Relations*, p. 2; Fox and Sandler, 'The Question of Religion and World Politics', p. 176. See further the discussion in chapter 3.

what religion is; observable phenomena, including human behaviour, are effects produced in the world by religion, which is in itself non-material.

Others have more invoked Locke more explicitly as the author of a cultural inheritance worth defending. Andrew Sullivan, writing in the *New York Times* in the wake of 9/11, reiterated Locke's mingling of security discourse with claims about true religion. Following Locke, he argued, those who wrote the constitution of the United States separated church and state as 'an attempt to answer the eternal human question of how to pursue the goal of religious salvation for ourselves and others and yet also maintain civil peace'.¹⁷¹ This solution was politically pragmatic, but it was the solution best able to secure genuine religion of individual choice and personal belief against all imposed orthodoxies. 'What the founders and Locke were saying was that the ultimate claims of religion should simply not be allowed to interfere with political and religious freedom. They did this to preserve peace above all – but also to preserve true religion itself'.¹⁷²

The persistent influence of Lockean categories on thinking about religion should give us pause for thought, for in its mixture of speculative beliefs and injunctions to obey a legalistic morality, we can see how closely Locke's conceptualisation of religion reflects the transformations in post-Reformation Christianity – particularly Protestant versions. For example, the point of religion is salvation, Locke claims, but his representation of what salvation means is even contestable in intra-Christian terms. It is, he suggests, a matter of the soul not the body, other-worldly rather than this-worldly, and individual rather than social, yet none of these would have adequately described medieval Christian discourses of salvation. This is by no means an exercise in mocking Locke's ignorance of other faiths: his audience was overwhelmingly Christian and more the most part Protestant. The point is merely that to remain within the boundaries he prescribed for it, religion must assume a particular form that is much closer to Protestant Christianity than anything else, and so any attempt to extend the paradigm to include other faiths is likely to prove highly contentious.

4.5 Political Economy: the Market as Peacemaker

¹⁷¹ Sullivan, 'This is a Religious War'. An interesting critique of Sullivan's views is William T. Cavanaugh, 'Killing in the Name of God', *New Blackfriars* vol. 85, no. 999 (2004), pp. 511-513.

¹⁷² Sullivan, 'This is a Religious War'.

More peaceful domestic conditions during the eighteenth century meant that religion was less frequently problematised within a discourse of security. Nevertheless, in the eighteenth century a new conception of order arose which projected peaceful social conditions as being dependent not on functioning legal relations but a combination of self-interest and natural sentiments of sympathy and benevolence. 'The market transaction replaced the oath taken upon the word of God as the paradigmatic social act. Whereas Locke had believed market transactions could only be sustained by the threat of force, whether by God or the magistrate, they were now held to be mutually beneficial and self-sustaining.'¹⁷³ Wootton comments that 'fear of the law, both human and divine, was no longer the chief bond of society. Where nature had been conceived in the seventeenth century as governed by an omnipotent law-giver, society was now held by the eighteenth century to be sustained by impersonal natural forces, the passions and the interests'.¹⁷⁴

The sovereignty model within which Hobbes and Locke imagined political order conceived the latter as an artificial construct for the regulation of anarchy and violence; now, however, the liberal political economy paradigm conceived order as an unintended harmony resulting from separate individual actions and transactions. It spontaneously emerged from anarchy itself, as private interests, when pursued unhindered, would be harmonised through the mysterious mechanisms of the market – Adam Smith's 'invisible hand'. The economy, newly discovered as a separate level of reality to be differentiated from the state, was the most important site for the operation of this mechanism. However, the mechanism of natural synthesis was imagined in broader terms than the economy alone. The notion of civil society invented by Adam Ferguson in the second half of the eighteenth century conceived the whole of human association in this fashion.¹⁷⁵ It was an all-encompassing domain in which not only self-interest, but also that which Ferguson called 'disinterested interests' – instinctual, benevolent, sympathetic impulses for each other and loathing for others – coexisted with the egoistic acquisitive passions in the broad manifold of human interests.

Liberal political economy claimed that the workings of society constituted a 'quasi-nature' composed of a variety of natural processes, such as economic activity, the development of population, language and morality. This had implications for

¹⁷³ Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); Wootton, 'The Fear of God in Early Modern Political Theory', pp. 76-77.

¹⁷⁴ Wootton, 'The Fear of God in Early Modern Political Theory', p. 77.

¹⁷⁵ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, pp. 298-311.

government, which could only be successfully conducted in accordance with the laws of that nature, the laws which govern the processes by which civil society generates its own order and prosperity.¹⁷⁶ These processes were now conceived as essentially autonomous areas of life, constituted by the free actions of individuals, in which natural equilibrium and the common good are the unintended outcomes of these individuals' pursuit of their own objectives.¹⁷⁷ Beneficial social and economic outcomes are conceived within liberal thought as the result of processes that are autonomous; good government therefore means respecting the integrity of these processes and governing in accordance with them.

This paradigm engendered a new understanding of peace: not a new conception of peace, for it was still understood as a condition of mutual respect for life and liberty, but a new conception of how it could be achieved and maintained. It was no longer, within this paradigm, the product of a strong state in balance or alliance with other states, marshalling its forces through disciplining its population internally to maximise its strength and wealth. It could now be imagined as brought about by a natural process of social harmonisation.¹⁷⁸ Kant, for example, wrote that 'Perpetual peace is *guaranteed* by no less an authority than the great artist *Nature* herself (*natura daedala rerum*). The mechanical process of nature visibly exhibits the purposive plan of producing concord among men, even against their will and indeed by means of this very discord'.¹⁷⁹ We have a duty, Kant contends, to promote it using this natural mechanism, whose instruments are geography, war ('nature's means of peopling the whole earth'),¹⁸⁰ and mankind's selfish inclinations.

Internally, the solution to the problem of setting up a state composed of selfish men is to 'arrange it in such a way that their self-seeking energies are opposed to one another, each thereby neutralising or eliminating the destructive effects on the rest...man, even if he is not morally good in himself, is nevertheless compelled to be a good citizen'.¹⁸¹ Peace arises spontaneously out of conflict, with no need for any moral improvement or infusion of grace, for 'it only means finding out how the mechanism of nature can be applied to men in such a manner that the antagonism of their hostile attitudes will make them compel one another to submit to coercive laws, thereby producing a condition of peace within which the laws can be enforced'.¹⁸² Externally,

¹⁷⁶ Gordon, 'Governmental Rationality: An Introduction', p. 15.

¹⁷⁷ Barry Hindess, 'Politics and Governmentality', *Economy and Society* vol. 26, no. 2 (1997), p. 267.

¹⁷⁸ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, pp. 56-58.

¹⁷⁹ Immanuel Kant, 'Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch', in Hans Reiss (ed.), *Kant: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 108. Italics in original.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 113.

peace among states was guaranteed by 'an equilibrium of forces and a most vigorous rivalry' which compels men to come to mutual understanding and peace.¹⁸³

There is a contemporary version of this Kantian argument about the necessary role of conflict in the maturation process of humanity. This is the claim that Islam inclines towards extremism because it has not experienced the Wars of Religion through which Christians learned moderation. Andrew Sullivan is again exemplary here, when he argues that 'unlike Europe's religious wars, which taught Christians the futility of fighting to the death over something beyond human understanding and so immune to any definitive resolution, there has been no such educative conflict in the Muslim world'.¹⁸⁴ He continued, proposing that we are in the early stages of a war with Islamic extremism because 'Only Iran and Afghanistan have experienced the full horror of revolutionary fundamentalism, and only Iran has so far seen reason to moderate to some extent. From everything we see, the lessons Europe learned in its bloody history have yet to be absorbed within the Muslim world'.¹⁸⁵ Note the use of the phrase 'educative conflict', and the assumption that Islam will inevitably tend towards extremism until it has passed through this phase, as if it was somehow necessary for more peaceful religion to become possible.

Finally, Kant proposes that the expansion of the spirit of commerce will bring peace because it cannot exist alongside war.¹⁸⁶ Montesquieu and James Steuart had also fostered hopes that the expansion of commerce would have pacifying influence on European political culture. The expectation was that the destructive passions of the powerful, such as lust for glory, would be curbed and counteracted through the encouragement of gentler passions, such as the acquisitive interest in wealth.¹⁸⁷ Not all political economy thinkers were so sanguine about the prospect of peace. Adam Smith was less optimistic about the political benefits of commerce, even as he extolled the economic advantages of the free pursuit of self-interest.¹⁸⁸ Ferguson also regarded the economic bond as highly ambiguous, continually threatening the more general social bond, in that it both brought individuals together through the spontaneous convergence of their self-interest, yet divided them through providing incentives for egoism.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸³ Ibid., pp. 113-114.

¹⁸⁴ Sullivan, 'This is a Religious War'.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Kant, 'Perpetual Peace', p. 115.

¹⁸⁷ Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*, pp. 69-92.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 100-113.

¹⁸⁹ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, p. 302; Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*, pp. 119-125.

The purpose here, however, is to illustrate a second liberal discourse of order and the theory of peace and security it articulates. Alongside the juridical liberal conception of security as ensured through sovereignty and the rule of law, there is another strand of thought that sees security as arising in the absence of the law through a competitive market society in which self-interest and the common good are combined. As R.B.J. Walker has argued, these two ways of thinking have informed twentieth century thinking about interstate politics, informing classical realism and neorealism respectively. Liberal accounts of life within states are projected into the realm between them.¹⁹⁰ In the next chapter, it will be noted that Tony Blair understands the threat posed by terrorism associated with Islam through the lens of the liberal political economy account of society, translated onto a global scale. Security can only be ensured if all govern or conduct themselves according to liberal principles, respecting the freedom required by market mechanisms. Religion was dangerous, for Blair, to the extent that it threatens or fails to abide by the structures of cooperation and ordered competition through which social and economic processes should normatively be managed.

It should be noted that the political economy paradigm did not supercede the political-juridical conception, and indeed there is even a moment present in social contract theories in which interests are spontaneously harmonised. Pierre Manent points out that the state of nature always involves an intolerable state of war, or a tendency to become such, because otherwise the need for law and the transition to political society is inexplicable – nothing else could compel men to leave a state in which they were flourishing.¹⁹¹ In the Hobbesian version, the clash of passions in the state of nature produces a point of rupture where the desire for dominion, glory and riches within each person is counteracted and overcome by the fear of death and desire for peace, after which order is guaranteed by law.¹⁹²

Nevertheless the two discourses have coexisted uneasily, because the law will always be necessary to police abuses within the spheres of free association and cannot be dispensed with, yet excessive legal restrictions on freedom undermine the system of natural liberty through which security and wealth are generated. It was suggested by Adam Smith among others that interventionist models of government that operate through constant interventions in the behaviour of individuals are not only detrimental to

¹⁹⁰ Walker, 'Security, Sovereignty, and the Challenge of World Politics', pp. 18-20.

¹⁹¹ Pierre Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, trans. Rebecca Balinski (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 48.

¹⁹² Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*, pp. 31-32; John Milbank, 'Paul Against Biopolitics', *Theory, Culture and Society* vol. 25, no. 7-8 (2008), p. 126.

the goals of national economic expansion, but also internal social order. With regard to the latter, Smith pointed out in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* that the cities in which the greatest control is exercised do not in practice enjoy the greatest security. The conclusion to be drawn from this, Smith claimed, was not that police regulation was a cause of crime, but that crime is caused by a lack of freedom within the population.¹⁹³ In contrast to the earlier idea that the security of the state depended on a detailed and continuous regulation of people and their behaviour, liberalism suggests that the goal of security is best served through the creation of conditions in which individuals can exercise their freedom.

One can see something of this in the juridical liberal commendation of religious toleration as being more likely to produce peace than the imposition of uniformity. However, the relationship of religion and peace has also been understood within the political economy frame. Kant even proposed the utility of religious war in the greater good that nature intends for man.¹⁹⁴ Confessional differences were one of the providential mechanisms (alongside linguistic differences) by which nature separated nations and prevented the formation of a super-state. This would be dangerous because laws are progressively less effective over greater distances, and so a soulless despotism would inevitably degenerate into anarchy. The presence of various confessions keep nations divided, and while this may occasion mutual hatred and provide a pretext for wars, this conflict will gradually bring men to greater mutual agreement and peace. However, war among competing confessions is not really, for Kant, religious war. The confessions 'have nothing to do with religion itself' but are merely different and historically variable 'vehicles' for the one religion valid for all men at all times, which is a universal, inward disposition closely connected to morality.¹⁹⁵

Religion here contributes to peace both directly as morality and indirectly as a part of the broader historical processes through which nations come to social maturity, but there is no room for a distinctive religious vision of human sociality. Indeed, when peace is assured through governing in accordance with certain quasi-natural social processes, there seems to be little distinctive contribution that could possibly be made by the different historical confessions, those vehicles for religion itself. Beyond disrupting those processes, that is. For extrapolating from the liberal political economy injunction to

¹⁹³ Barry Hindess, *Discourses of Power: From Hobbes to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 126-127.

¹⁹⁴ Kant, 'Perpetual Peace', pp. 113-114.

¹⁹⁵ Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism*, p. 132; Kant, 'Perpetual Peace', p. 114.

respect certain natural social processes, one could suggest that any reordering of social relations that rejected on theological grounds the necessity or desirability of a conflictual market economy, for example, would simply be bad, if not dangerous, government.

Indeed, Lisa Hill has recently argued that Adam Smith regarded religious enthusiasm, particularly when institutionalised, as likely to dangerously corrupt the equilibrium that is found in the system of natural liberty.¹⁹⁶ For Smith, she writes, 'Religious enthusiasm obstructs the natural course of progress, science and civility and is the enemy of "common sense" and "reason", hence, its tendency to provoke social conflict and violence'.¹⁹⁷ He was not averse to religion as such. He professed a 'natural religion' that interpreted the universe as a divinely ordained system governed by general laws directed towards the preservation and prosperity of everything in it. Religious zealotry was a deviation from this natural state, a state to which religion would revert if not corrupted by faction and ambition. The remedy for religious enthusiasm was the market mechanism itself. The forces of competition are likely to expose the false, intolerant and dangerous doctrines and privilege the simple truths of natural religion.¹⁹⁸

A situation of free competition, Smith speculated, would be far more likely to secure the tranquillity of the commonwealth.¹⁹⁹ One obstacle to such a situation was an established church, which could be equally dangerous to the security of the sovereign, for its ministers had an interest in maintaining their authority over the people. If they decided to preach doctrines subversive of sovereign authority, the ruler may not even be able to rely on a standing army to quell rebellion, for the soldiers are likely to be drawn from the people and corrupted by the same doctrines.²⁰⁰ The evils of an established church were due to an over-close connection between religion and politics though. Smith notes that 'Times of violent religious controversy have generally been times of equally violent political faction'.²⁰¹ The contending political parties seek to increase their strength by aligning themselves with one or other of the religious factions; the political victor is then immediately presented with demands from the clergy to subdue followers of the other religious faction and give their own a privileged position within the state.

If politics and religion had never combined, however, each man would have been free to choose his own religion and the natural processes of the market would

¹⁹⁶ Lisa Hill, 'Adam Smith and the Theme of Corruption', *The Review of Politics* vol. 68 (2006).

¹⁹⁷ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations: Books IV-V*, pp. 375-404.

¹⁹⁸ Hill, 'Adam Smith and the Theme of Corruption', p. 658.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 658-660.

²⁰⁰ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations: Books IV-V*.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 385-386. See also Smith, *The Wealth of Nations: Books IV-V*, p. 379.

undoubtedly have produced ‘a great multitude of religious sects’.²⁰² This would have been highly beneficial for three reasons. Firstly, it would obviously have prevented any one sect enjoying the hegemonic power of a state-protected monopoly, and none would be strong enough to threaten the state. ‘The interested and active zeal of religious teachers can be dangerous and troublesome only where there is either but one sect tolerated in the society, or where the whole of a large society is divided into two or three great sects, the teachers of each acting by concert, and under a regular discipline and subordination’.²⁰³

Secondly, it would improve relations among religious groups. If there were hundreds or thousands of small sects, though, the teachers of each would be surrounded on all sides by more competitors or adversaries than friends and would quickly learn a spirit of moderation. The market mechanism of unintended outcomes through antagonistic encounter is here applied by Smith to theorise the conditions of religious peace. The religious subject here is the freely-choosing liberal individual acting according to his desires. The irreducible plurality of individual desires is reflected in the diversity of religious ‘provision’ when the free market is allowed to operate unhindered. Yet there is also a confidence that competition in the market would increase the quality of the ‘product’ and by extension the behaviour of the ‘consumer’.

If the first beneficial effect is neutralising threats to the state, the second is the improvement of relations among religious groups, then the third was that the free market would shape the piety of the population in the direction of true and moderate religion:

The teachers of each little sect, finding themselves almost alone, would be obliged to respect those of almost every other sect, and the concessions which they would mutually find it both convenient and agreeable to make to one another, might in time probably reduce the doctrine of the greater part of them to that pure and rational religion, free from every mixture of absurdity, imposture, or fanaticism.²⁰⁴

Religious truth emerges through the mechanism of the market. Just as the forces of competition were expected to push the market price of a product or commodity towards its natural price, religion would revert to its true state unless clerical or governmental interference thwarts the proper operation of the market. One can note another current

²⁰² Smith, *The Wealth of Nations: Books IV-V*, p. 380.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 380-381.

feeding into the contemporary claims referred to above concerning the contribution made by religious freedom to domestic stability.

Smith's account of the religion-security nexus implicitly prescribed the appropriate mode of government in relation to religion. For the most part, governmental interference should be avoided where possible, in order to allow the unhindered operation of market forces. However, despite Smith's general confidence in the benefits that would attend the clash of religious passions, he did suggest that some extra governmental measures might be required as an antidote to the rigorous and unsocial morality among certain sects. Public diversions such as painting, poetry, music, dancing 'and all sorts of dramatic representations and exhibitions' would dissipate 'that melancholy and gloomy humour which is always the nurse of popular superstition and enthusiasm'.²⁰⁵

The religious ideal Smith preferred for his society was clearly a deistic eighteenth century conception of religion. Yet the larger problem is that the liberal political economy paradigm is itself already a theological option. The idea that prosperity and order are spontaneously generated through the autonomous operation of certain laws according to which human social and economic processes operate itself relies upon theological assumptions about the world. As John Milbank has argued, the 'invisible hand of the market' was not just a metaphor but a kind of social theodicy which sought to explain and justify social order in terms of a benevolent providence, a 'divinely executed social design'.²⁰⁶ Theology entered into the very description of reality assumed by liberal political economy, and its conception of peace cannot therefore function as a neutral standard against which particular expressions of religion can be judged.

Conclusion

This chapter, building on the arguments of Part I and especially chapter 2, has examined how the differentiation of religion as a separate sphere of life was a security strategy developed in response to the wars of religion in the seventeenth century. The shift to the state as the guarantor of more peaceful social relations involved the creation of a set of non-confessional interests in prosperity and peace, the meaning of the latter completing its transformation from the medieval ideal of friendship to the modern liberal concept of

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 384.

²⁰⁶ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, pp. 37-41. See also Lisa Hill, 'The Hidden Theology of Adam Smith', *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* vol. 8, no. 1 (2001).

security as warding off threats to life, freedom and property. The limitation of the juridical authority of the state with the development of liberal political discourse and the expansion of toleration, also in the name of security, demarcated the boundaries of politics and religion more firmly and definitively. This movement was completed with the new political economy paradigm, in which security could only be assured through the complete separation of religion from the state, the unhindered operation of market mechanisms in both the economy and the religious realm, and the skilful ‘management’ of the conditions of this freedom through incentives and disincentives rather than coercive legal regulation.

The liberal accounts of security and religion present a particular choice: between a privatised religion of personal choice compatible with a liberal order in which peace and unity are secured by the state or the market on the one hand, and a violent fanaticism corrosive of all prosperity and security. As I shall discuss in more detail in chapter 6, this choice was represented to the world in the first decade of the twenty-first century by a leading figure in world politics, namely the Prime Minister of the UK, Tony Blair.

The choice presented as part of the liberal account of the necessary conditions of security represents a powerful evaluative dichotomy disciplining particular manifestations of ‘religion’, which can now be either benign and tolerable in liberal terms, or dangerous and extremist. Yet one might want to refuse both of these alternatives. Doubting the claim that a secular, liberal sovereign state is a necessary condition of peaceful coexistence is not to deny the historical involvement of religious groups in aggressive conflict and persecution. It is, however, to observe that it was a solution devised in very particular circumstances in a specific religious context. The historical variability of different forms and expressions of faith traditions means that there can be no universal ‘problem of religion and politics’, and it would be a mistake to suppose that seventeenth century Christianity was paradigmatic of religion as such. Furthermore, while it was justified as reflecting the true nature of religion, returning it to its natural boundaries, it was a conception of religion heavily indebted to Protestantism. This fact, and the theological nature of the discourses within which the central terms of liberalism were imagined render it ill-qualified to act as a neutral standard against which all particular religious projects are evaluated, problematic even from some mainstream Christian perspectives.

The chapter that follows examines the constitution of religion as a genus within attempts to find a common ground uniting the warring confessions of seventeenth

century Europe. It is argued that the common ground strategy was not only facilitated by the move towards a security order centred on the state, but that the minimalist, theistic conception of religion it privileged was precisely that which was conceived as necessary for the sovereign state in that era. This argument in turn points forward to Blair's own articulation of the common ground strategy in chapter 6, and the significant argument that the common ground strategy and the differentiation strategy work closely together in his contemporary expression of liberal security discourse.

5 SECURITY, VIOLENCE, AND THE COMMON GROUND STRATEGY

Continuing the examination of the constitutive role of security concerns in the imagination of 'religion', the present chapter takes up the problem identified earlier (chapter 3) that not only does religion participate in the same problems as many other contested social concepts, but it has its own unique peculiarity. That is, there are no common features shared by all that is conventionally included in the category that are specific enough to mark off religious traditions from other types of tradition. In other words, religion cannot be understood as both a genus and a specific domain of culture. This combination of assumptions, which I have called the modern discourse of religion, is relatively sedimented though, giving it a stability and level of obviousness that make it very difficult to think 'religion' in any other terms. The question that must inevitably arise here is: how did this situation come about? How did it become possible to imagine the religions to be species of a common genus?

The last chapter argued that the constitution of differentiated spheres of politics and religion was the effect, in part, of a liberal security strategy rather than a recognition of the objective nature of the different societal spheres. The idea that religion was essentially separate from politics received a powerful authorisation once it was proposed that civil peace was dependent on keeping political life and the practices of faith separate. This chapter argues that the notion of a common ground uniting the world religions was originally a strategic construction designed to secure consensus among warring confessional factions. The strategy described in the last chapter sought a solution *outside* of religion, by grounding political activity in certain exceptionless norms and procedures independent of all particular confessional allegiances. The second strategy, examined in this chapter, attempted to find a solution *within* religion by searching for a set of elements common to all confessions.¹ The extent of the common ground sought tended to vary. Some sought agreement between Christians only, but there were others who attempted

¹ Charles Taylor identifies these two strategies as the forerunners of modern modes of secularism. The argument here is that they were also constitutive of the concept of religion itself. Taylor, 'Modes of Secularism', pp. 32-38.

to identify common fundamentals shared by all religions. However, there was very little detailed or reliable knowledge about non-Christian traditions in this period, and what sources were available were used very freely in the polemical service of the perceived needs of the present. The construction of the common ground consequently followed the pattern familiar from chapter 3: features of Christianity were projected onto other traditions. Nevertheless, this strategic construction was subsequently taken to be a discovery. By the time more accurate ethnographic data on non-European beliefs and practices was available, the notion of religion as a genus was already well established, and scholars have since been inclined to keep searching for the elusive common core rather than question the assumption that it exists.

For the purposes of this thesis, these developments illustrate how the construction of religion as a genus was a side-effect of the search for a common ground that could serve politico-security purposes. In this way, they also help to explain how this problematic notion was initially imagined. The second reason for their significance is that they highlight what is at stake in the persistence of this concept as a mode of imagining religion that informs contemporary political practice. They contribute to a better understanding of what is at stake in the contemporary politics *about* religion, and prominent approaches to it. Specifically, they illuminate some of the difficulties involved in more recent attempts to build peace on the assumption that there are certain features and dispositions that are normative for *all* religious traditions, elements that are more significant than the differences between them. The argument here is that the common ground strategy does not come to terms with the difficult issues involved in encounters between traditions because it displaces rather than solves conflict. This is primarily because there are contentious theological issues in defining what is central to a tradition and what is indifferent, and secondarily because it tends to privilege forms of religion that are compatible with the perceived needs of the liberal security order.

The argument in this chapter proceeds in four steps. The first section argues that there was no sense that the religions were species of a common genus until the seventeenth century. It also proposes that there was too little reliable data to make plausible generalisations about common features of non-Christian traditions. The second and third sections examine influential early formulations of the common ground in the seventeenth century, proposing that they were theorised specifically with the aim of securing a consensus among warring confessions. As with the last chapter, the argument is advanced by focusing on two key writers whose writings mark important shifts in the

imagination of religion, rather than by providing a comprehensive overview of the ideas of the period. The second section examines Grotius' attempt to find a set of common fundamentals shared by all Christians. Grotius' approach marks an intermediate stage in the imagination of religion as a genus, where Christianity was still regarded as the paradigmatic instance of religion, even though it was now conceived as sharing a certain minimal content with other religions. Section three focuses on Edward Herbert, the first writer to attempt to explicitly abstract a concept of religion from the content of 'the religions'. In both of these writers, what is essential in matters of religion is sifted out from what is false or harmful according to a standard of earthly peace – not the Augustinian peace of classical Christianity, though, but the statist peace of the emergent liberal order. The final section offers some criticisms of the common ground as a strategy for managing inter-faith relations.

5.1 The Invention of 'Religion'

In chapters 2 and 4, it was argued that the use of 'religion' to designate a particular domain of human activity was an invention of the modern West, registering a secularisation process in which various spheres of life were constituted as possessing their own purposes and rationalities. The new meaning of the concept thus registered a change in the discursive ordering of society, and new distinctions between God-oriented activity and that directed towards human goods. In a similar fashion, the common ground strategy articulated a particular theory of how the religions were related to one another. The emergence of this new mode of categorisation was registered by a new concept of religion as a genus. In the same way that the idea of differentiated religion was peculiar to the modern West, so was the idea that there exist in the world such things as 'religions' sharing a common essence – 'religion' in general. Just as the security-driven differentiation of religion contributed to the constitution of the religion as a concept referring to a life-sphere, the common ground strategy also contributed to the creation of religion as a unified phenomenon embodied in diverse religions.

During the Middle Ages, there was no sense that Christianity was one of a number of diverse yet equivalent and comparable 'religions'. Theologian Paul Griffiths, writing of the Middle Ages, has commented that

Christianity was rarely, if ever, thought of as one religion among many; Christians did not, before the modern period, have the idea that there is a type called *religion* of which there are many tokens or instances – Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Confucianism, and so on (just as there is a type called *currency* of which there are many tokens – dollars, euros, pounds, deutschmarks, and so on). The idea that religion is a type with tokens is largely a modern invention.²

Major traditions sometimes entered into what were known in their Christian-Muslim form as ‘disputations’ – comparative or polemical inquiries into their various claims in contexts where co-existence threw their divergences into sharper relief.³ While such enquiries may have taken as their point of departure some contingent overlap such as a common monotheism, there was no assumption that the traditions being discussed were species of a genus called ‘religion’.⁴ From the fourth until the fifteenth century, Western Christians rarely wrote about those things that are now termed *religions*. Judaism was interesting principally as a precursor to Christianity and preparation for the gospel, Islam was most often thought of as a Christian heresy rather than a non-Christian religion, and the non-Abrahamic modes of belief and practice in India, China, Japan, Africa and the Americas were largely unknown until the sixteenth century. Where other traditions such as Buddhism were encountered in the East, the difference between Christians and non-Christians was articulated in relation to the fall.⁵ Augustine, for example, did not deny the existence of pagan gods, but described them as fallen angels and therefore improper objects of worship.⁶ Those who did not profess Christianity either had no religion, or false or distorted forms.

The conceptual resources for imagining religion as a genus did not appear until the early modern era. Peter Harrison captures the novelty and uniqueness of this way of thinking when he writes that “The concepts “religion” and “the religions,” as we presently understand them, emerged quite late in Western thought, during the

² Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity*, pp. 3-4.

³ David Burrell, 'Some Requisites for Interfaith Dialogue', *New Blackfriars* vol. 89, no. 1021 (2008), pp. 302-303. In thirteenth century Baghdad the Jew Ibn Kammuna wrote his *Examination of the Three Faiths* contrasting the claims of the revealed monotheisms, and late medieval Spain was the setting for a number of staged disputations between Jews and Christians. J. Samuel Preus, 'The Bible and Religion in the Century of Genius', *Religion* vol. 28 (1998), p. 12.

⁴ Milbank, 'The End of Dialogue', p. 176.

⁵ David Scott, 'Christian Responses to Buddhism in Pre-Medieval Times', *Numen* vol. 32, no. 1 (1985); Kenneth Surin, 'A "Politics of Speech": Religious Pluralism in the Age of the McDonald's Hamburger', in Gavin D'Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), p. 197.

⁶ e.g. Augustine, *City of God*, pp. 61 [II, 10].

Enlightenment. Between them, these two notions provided a new framework for classifying particular aspects of human life'.⁷ The period in which 'religion' was invented as a genus can be pointed to with reasonable precision.⁸ To be sure, as we will see below, precursors of the modern meaning can be identified in the late Middle Ages, and the shift did not eradicate older meanings entirely: something very like the older medieval usage continued to exist alongside a much more modern version of the concept as late as the eighteenth century in Germany.⁹ Nevertheless, in the English language at least, the linguistic shift seems to have first occurred, become widely used, and then largely superseded earlier usages in the space of around thirty years in the early 17th century. The timing of this emergence is significant for two reasons. First of all, it means that the modern concept of religion as a genus was established in common usage almost two centuries before any reliable ethnographic information was available about other 'religions'. Secondly, it emerged in the middle of the wars being fought in part over the true version of the Christian religion. The assumption that underlay this new linguistic convention was misplaced, however. The consequence of this was discussed in the third chapter: four centuries of searching for the common element that unites 'the religions' has failed to yield any result that does not posit their commonalities at such an abstract level as to coincide with definitions of culture.

From 'religio' to 'religion': the linguistic shift

I noted in chapter 2 that religion was a marginal concept in the Middle Ages. Shortly after 1400, it was revived by humanists such as Nicholas of Cusa and Marsilio Ficino, who used it in much the same way as Augustine had used it in *De Vera Religione* – in the sense of a reverent, worshipful or pious attitude to God that could be correct or false. In this usage it was understood to be singular, and an attribute or possession of individuals

⁷ Harrison, *"Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*, p. 1.

⁸ The account here of the shift in the meaning of 'religion' draws principally on the following sources: John Bossy, 'Some Elementary Forms of Durkheim', *Past and Present* vol., no. 95 (1982); Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism*; Feil, 'From the Classical *Religio* to the Modern *Religion*: Elements of a Transformation Between 1550 and 1650'; Ernst Feil, '"Religio" and "Religion" in the Eighteenth Century', in Jan G. Platvoet and Arie L. Moledijk (eds.), *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Harrison, *"Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*; Smith, 'Religion, Religions, Religious'; Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*; Ward, *True Religion*. A useful historical overview of the antecedents of the modern comparative study of religion, albeit with little discussion of the rise of the category itself, is provided by Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (London: Duckworth, 1975), pp. 1-26.

⁹ See Ernst Feil's comparison of the different ways the term is used by Christian Wolff and Johann Christian Edelmann in early eighteenth century Germany. Feil, '"Religio" and "Religion" in the Eighteenth Century'.

akin to the modern notion of 'religiosity'. It was in this tradition that Ficino wrote *De Christiana Religione*, in which the qualifier 'Christian' is intended to convey the proper form of worship rather than the idea that Christianity is one religion among many.¹⁰

The revived classical usage of *religio* as true piety continued into the sixteenth century, and can be found in works by the Protestant reformers Zwingli and Calvin. Governments began to use it in this period, following this humanist sense; when Henry VIII used the concepts of 'Christian' and 'Christ's religion', he meant the correct mode of Christian piety, in contrast with the superstitious mode practiced by monks and friars. This was wholly conventional, for in the sixteenth century in general, where the Latin form *Christiana religio* is found, it must be translated as 'Christian religion' rather than '*the* Christian religion'.¹¹ What true piety involved was obviously subject to interpretation; whereas Protestant usage began a movement towards an inward understanding of piety as a devotional or adoration state of mind, the accounts brought back by Catholic explorers from the New World tended to deploy religion in close proximity to the notion of ritual.¹² By the late seventeenth century though, the meaning of religion had undergone a significant transformation from a virtue practiced in the context of the Christian community of believers, to an objective entity, a generic object abstracted from a number of specific instances. Religion had previously been spoken of only in the singular, but now the plural form 'religions' emerged, and with it the new singular form 'a religion'. The transition can be understood as marking a shift from a conviction regarding the 'the genuineness of Christian religiousness' to one of 'the truth of the Christian religion'.¹³ More than being the enlargement of the previous meaning, this development represented the invention of a completely new meaning.¹⁴

There were two significant shifts here. The first was towards the concept of 'a religion' as meaning a system of doctrines or moral principles. The traditional sense of religion as worship or worshipfulness (so that one could have 'Christian religion' or 'Catholic religion') largely gave way to the concept of 'religions' – 'a plurality of objective entities erected around a set of doctrines or principles and therefore true or not true, but above all different'.¹⁵ The second was the abstraction of a common essence, which was

¹⁰ Harrison, "*Religion*" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment, pp. 12-14; P.O. Kristeller, *Il Pensiero Filosofico di Marsilio Ficino* (Firenze: G.C. Sansoni, 1953), pp. 341-349; Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, pp. 32-34.

¹¹ Bossy, 'Some Elementary Forms of Durkheim', pp. 4-5.

¹² Smith, 'Religion, Religions, Religious', pp. 270-271.

¹³ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, p. 39.

¹⁴ Feil, "'Religio' and 'Religion' in the Eighteenth Century", p. 143.

¹⁵ Bossy, 'Some Elementary Forms of Durkheim', p. 6.

understood at this time as certain essential or fundamental doctrines or moral norms common to all varieties of Christianity, and later all religions. Both developments can be understood in different ways as by-products of the Reformation.

The earliest work in which the plural 'religions of the world' can be found predates the Reformation; this Catholic usage from 1508 deployed the phrase in reference to differing outward patterns of religious life. The idea of the plural religions did not become common though, and according to Wilfred Cantwell Smith does not recur at all until Protestant texts published a century later, whose wide circulation helped to establish the concept in common use.¹⁶ The transformation from Christian life as the embodiment of true religiousness to Christianity as an 'ism' – one of a number of 'religions' – took place largely in the first third of the seventeenth century, and can be seen in progress in important works by the Anglican Richard Hooker and the Catholic Robert Parsons writing in the 1590s. Both began with the traditional sense of religion as a worshipful attitude towards God, but ended up by writing of 'religions' as plural entities whose core was made up of differing sets of doctrines and principles.¹⁷

In *De veritate religionis Christianae*, the influential work of Hugo Grotius, the shift is more fully completed. While he talks at times in the old sense of religion as a surpassingly excellent, and therefore true, form of worship, his major concern is to prove that Christianity is *the* true religion by demonstration that its doctrines are statements of fact. Commenting on Grotius' usage, Wilfred Cantwell Smith writes that 'where earlier writers would have said that Christian religion *is*, he says that *the* Christian religion *teaches*, the worship of God with purity of mind and sincerity of moral behaviour'.¹⁸ Whilst this phrase – '*the* Christian religion' – was exceptional in 1600, by the time Grotius published his work in 1627 it had become relatively common. Other very similar usages from around this time can be found in Edward Herbert's *De veritate* of 1624 and Francis Bacon's *Essays* of 1625.¹⁹ William Chillingworth's *The Religion of Protestants* (1637) and Sir Thomas Browne's 1642 comment that 'there being a Geography of Religions, as of Lands' indicates a trend in the direction of plurality.²⁰

The objectification of different modes of worship as 'religions' was a consequence of 'the simple existence of a plurality of embodied, embattled,

¹⁶ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, pp. 42, and n.132.

¹⁷ Bossy, 'Some Elementary Forms of Durkheim', pp. 5-6.

¹⁸ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, p. 39.

¹⁹ Bossy, 'Some Elementary Forms of Durkheim', p. 6; Harrison, "*Religion*" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment, pp. 61-73.

²⁰ Bossy, 'Some Elementary Forms of Durkheim', pp. 7-8.

faiths...Objectification arose, then out of the need to describe ones own or other people's way of belief and life, as if from the outside, in circumstances where a plurality of such ways had come into existence'.²¹ From this plurality of religions it was a short step to the general notion of 'religion', or 'the Christian religion'. John Selden's sartorial metaphor expresses the new concept very clearly: 'Religion is like the Fashion: one Man wearing his Doublet slashed, another laced, another plain; but every Man has a Doublet: So every man has his Religion. We differ about Trimming'.²² The movement towards a doublet-and-trimming theory of religion took place 'especially in the minds of people who felt this plurality as a problem which urgently required solution'.²³

From the assumption that there were a variety of 'religions', the movement towards inquiry into what linked these apparently disparate set of beliefs and practices was initiated by those who saw this plurality as a problem. Christian unity was desirable for its own sake, but as was noted in the last chapter, a single religion was also considered necessary for the peace and stability of a commonwealth during the early modern period. From that perspective, the existing situation of pluralism was a threat, to which one solution was the imposition of uniformity by the civil power. There was another solution *within* religion, though: the reunification of Christendom through emphasising common fundamentals that could command the allegiance of all parties.

This common ground strategy should be understood in the context of a reforming movement of Christian humanism that predated the Reformation, but was rearticulated with increasing urgency in the wake of the schism. Hans Urs von Balthasar traces this project back to early Renaissance thinkers such as Dante, Nicholas of Cusa, Petrarch and Marsilio Ficino, who sought to recover the credibility of Christianity damaged by monastic abuses and hair-splitting scholasticism. Christianity was again asserted as the fulfilment of the wisdom of Plato, corresponding closely to the best natural inclinations of humanity, in a strategy that bracketed out the 'distortions' introduced by decadent medieval practice. At least since Ficino, the natural inclinations of humankind that Christianity fulfilled had been conceptualised as 'religion', but Christianity, and hence religion, was simple. This vision of a Christian faith stripped down and distilled to its essence was again asserted in the context of the destructive fighting after the Reformation, for it was said to be a way not only more faithful to Christ and the pure words of the Bible, but one that undermined the very grounds of the

²¹ Ibid., p. 5. See also Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, pp. 42-43.

²² John Selden, *Table Talk* (London: J.M. Dent and Co., 1689), p. 127.

²³ Bossy, 'Some Elementary Forms of Durkheim', p. 6.

conflict through emphasising the luminous fundamentals of the faith over controversial and inessential accretions that had proved so harmful to the unity of the Church.²⁴

This was the broader background against which the search for a common ground was undertaken: the problematisation of religious pluralism and confessional conflict; the increasing use of creeds and statements of faith to summarise the essence of 'the Protestant religion' or 'the true Catholic religion' as systems of beliefs or moral precepts; and a humanist urge for a simpler, more minimal religion. The novelty of the early seventeenth century search for a common ground was that it combined these tendencies in an effort to identify fundamental beliefs and ethical injunctions universally shared by all Christians, and then by extension all religions, around which all Christendom and ultimately humanity could unite. The idea of a common denominator shared by all religions ultimately proved to be misleading, as chapter 3 argued. This is perhaps unsurprising, as it religion was first 'identified' as a unified phenomenon in an era when there was little reliable information about non-European traditions.

Questions of method in early comparative religion

It has been suggested that Europeans began to use generic 'religion' in response to, and for the ordering of, the wealth of information about the non-European world produced by the expansion of trade and colonial endeavour. Jonathan Z. Smith points out that it was the question of diverse forms of piety – the plural religions – which forced a new interest in the singular, generic 'religion'.²⁵ According to J. Samuel Preus, religion arose 'of necessity' to describe an increasingly complex world; first, the fragmentation of Christendom and the proliferation of sects all claiming to be true Christianity, and then the awareness that Christianity was not the only religion.²⁶ It is true that the earliest works to use the generic 'religion', such as Edward Brerewood's *Enquiries Touching the Diversity of Languages and Religions through the Chief Parts of the World* (1614), do so in the context of an anthropological classification of four 'species' of religion.²⁷ And yet there are a number of

²⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), pp. 20-26.. Peter Harrison also identifies the Renaissance as an important source drawn on by early proponents of 'religion'. Harrison, *"Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*, pp. 10-14.

²⁵ Smith, 'Religion, Religions, Religious', p. 271.

²⁶ J. Samuel Preus, 'The Reified Heart in Seventeenth-Century Religion', in Michel Despland and Gérard Vallée (eds.), *Religion in History: The Word, the Idea, the Reality* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1992), p. 51.

²⁷ 'Christianity, Mohametanism, Judaism and Idolatry'. Harrison, *"Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*, p. 39; Smith, 'Religion, Religions, Religious', p. 271.

reasons why it cannot be accounted for entirely in terms of a response to other religions 'discovered' in the course of exploration and colonial expansion.

First of all, this perspective overstates the parochialism of medieval Christendom. Christians had always been aware of other traditions of worship and belief, from the polytheistic practices condemned in the Old Testament and the pagan cults, Gnosticism and Manichaeism of the Greco-Roman world to the close proximity of Jews and Muslims in the Middle Ages. Likewise, a proliferation of sects and heresies had always been a feature of Christendom, from the Montanists, Nestorians and Arians of the Patristic period to the Cathars of the high Middle Ages. There are records of Christian encounters with Buddhism at various times during the Middle Ages, from as early as the fourth century.²⁸ Yet encounter with these rival traditions and groups did not produce any suggestion that they were all discrete instances of an overarching genus. What had changed? Why did this taxonomy arise at this time?

It might be suggested that it was the information brought back by European traders, conquistadors and adventurers that furnished the seventeenth century with more accurate raw data within which religion was discovered. This suggestion does identify something important – a greater awareness of the variety of human cultural practices, as well as the discovery of differences from and similarities with Christian beliefs and rituals undoubtedly stimulated comparative thought.²⁹ However, there are compelling reasons to suppose that for the most part, the development of religion as a category did not emerge out of the identification of commonalities based on a careful study and detailed empirical knowledge of 'the religions'. The first relates to the absence of reliable sources, and the second to the way these sources were used (or more often, not used).

Early ventures into comparative religion by figures such as Edward Herbert were hindered by a lack of accurate data. For most of the period and for much of the world there was little reliable evidence from which to generalise; what knowledge did exist was restricted to Islam, ancient Judaism and to a lesser extent contemporary Judaism.³⁰ There was also a great reliance on travellers' reports, and material drawn from the authors of ancient Greece and Rome. The reports of travellers, while frequently adduced in support of various propositions about other religions, were often distorted and superficial. Their authors lacked the requisite linguistic skills and cultural awareness for an adequate

²⁸ Scott, 'Christian Responses to Buddhism in Pre-Medieval Times'.

²⁹ Smith, 'Religion, Religions, Religious', p. 270.

³⁰ David Pailin, *Attitudes to Other Religions: Comparative Religion in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 15. See also Harrison, "Religion" and the Religions in the *English Enlightenment*, p. 146.

understanding of what they attempted to relate. Original materials were not readily available, and this situation would not begin to change until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, by which time the notion of religion as a genus was already firmly established.³¹

One consequence of this lack of original sources was the practice general among those who studied other religions to repeat the views - and the errors - of earlier secondary works.³² Where such works were more readily accessible (such as Islamic and Jewish texts), they were often not used or dismissed as the biased ravings of fanatical or credulous minds.³³ Indicative of this carefree attitude to empirical investigation is the fact that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the search for the essence of religion was largely conducted by way of abstract reasoning.³⁴ This was to some degree a reflection of the Enlightenment confidence in the ability and universality of human reason, and the belief that religious truth must be supported by evidence available in principle at any time and place.³⁵

What this discussion reveals is that early modern thinkers were not forced to revise and expand their concept of religion by a critical mass of detailed empirical data that revealed an essential unity amongst the various foreign pieties. Understanding the non-European other was not the primary objective of most of those who wrote on religion in the period though. When original materials and direct reports about other religions were available and used, the selection and treatment of the material used was dictated by the polemical motives of the work in question. 'Authors pick out the elements which suit their intentions, some hostile and others sympathetic to the religions being reviewed, and ignore the rest'.³⁶ David Pailin writes that there was some awareness that the ideas and values expressed in the texts of other religions are only properly appreciated when they are understood in terms of their social, cultural and economic context, and speculates that many of those who did write early studies of other religions would mostly have assented to this principle. However, he adds, 'few came near to observing it. Usually it was on the basis of poor evidence and in a prejudiced frame of mind (as advocates for a position) that theologians in the age of reason approached other

³¹ Pailin, *Attitudes to Other Religions: Comparative Religion in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Britain*, pp. 17-20.

³² Ibid., p. 20.

³³ Ibid., p. 18.

³⁴ Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline*, pp. 1-12.

³⁵ The principle was expressed in Lessing's famous distinction between the accidental truths of history and necessary truths of reason. Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism*, pp. 70-78.

³⁶ Pailin, *Attitudes to Other Religions: Comparative Religion in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Britain*, p. 20.

religions'.³⁷ The use of history in such studies was similarly shaped by the argumentative needs of the present. The seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries lacked the relatively modern view that history is a more or less objective narration of events that happened in the past. The past was uncovered not for its own sake, nor simply for interest, but because it could serve the purposes of those engaged in the disputes and problems of the present.³⁸

The common ground as constitutive of religion

Perhaps the most important of these was the problem of peace. I noted in the last chapter that violence and disorder within society was a particular preoccupation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The scale of the attempts in this period to make over society, creating more disciplined and ordered populations, was unprecedented. This was often undertaken with the involvement of confessional authorities, but in those contexts where religious diversity made this unworkable, other solutions were sought. The last chapter examined the approach that sought to construct a common ground outside of religion, separating it from civil government. A second strategy attempted to solve the problem of religious diversity directly by attempting to find a common denominator that could provide an uncontroversial conception of what was essential in religion and what could be left to individual preference. The new concepts of 'religion' and 'the religions' did not simply represent a rationalisation of what was known, a greater systematisation imposed on existing knowledge or a logical response to the influx of new knowledge from European adventurers and explorers. Religion was a concept transformed in part by attempts to solve the religious and civil wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Before continuing to discuss the birth of the common ground strategy, there is a crucial feature that must be noted. Charles Taylor has made the important point that attempts to build peace and consensus on the basis of shared norms and principles, whether these are taken to be grounded in a secular account of security (as discussed in the last chapter) or a set of common religious beliefs (as explored in this chapter), necessarily relied on the idea that the norms and principles identified as common trumped the demands of particular confessional allegiance.³⁹ The identification of a

³⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

³⁸ Harrison, *"Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*, p. 77.

³⁹ Taylor, 'Modes of Secularism', p. 33.

common ground, whether inside or outside of religion, could only function as a strategy of security if all parties accepted that what was shared was ultimately more significant than what divided them. Acceptance of this idea had implications not only for the success of the independent ethic and the common ground as strategies of security, but in the construction of religion. Within the independent ethic approach, it was argued not only that there are certain principles of politics that can be observed from a rational study of the human condition, but that these norms are binding whatever our confessional religious commitments. Once accepted, this idea not only delegitimised alternative confessional accounts of the nature of political life that would call into question the distinction between politics and religion, it provided a standpoint from which religion could be categorised and judged. Because the norms of politics and security were derived from undeniable facts of human nature, any religion which did not conform to the injunctions that followed from them would come under instant suspicion as anti-social or even anti-human.

Within the common ground approach, it was not simply argued that the religions shared certain features contingently, but that these common beliefs were the most important part of every religion and therefore have priority over what is not shared in common. Thus it might be suggested that it is more important that Muslims and Christians both believe in a creator god, or a god who is one, than that they disagree over the doctrine of the Trinity and the status of the Qur'an. Pushed further, this could become the idea that the diverse elements of religion were unnecessary accretions; nevertheless, even in its weaker form it authorised the view that what was shared by the religions was not merely contingent overlap generated by historical influence, but a necessary aspect of their identity as diverse expressions of a single phenomenon. The correlate of the notion that whatever else one might happen to believe, certain principles are binding and non-negotiable, is the idea that whatever else a religion might teach, there are certain doctrines, principles or functions that it must have to be called a religion.

This is crucial, as it explains how religion came to be constituted as a genus and points to a central problem with the strategy. With regard to the first, the identification of features that Christianity shared with other 'religions' need not have necessarily led to them being conceptualised as species of a common genus, as the example of the Middle Ages demonstrates – they might equally have been conceptualised as contingent overlaps or coincidences of outlook based on a shared cultural inheritance. However, once those features of religion that are shared are represented as more important than those that are

contentious, it leads easily to the idea that supposed commonalities between the religions are more than contingent, but go right to the heart of what each tradition *is*. At the same time though, this is what makes common ground strategies so problematic. Because they must make a claim about what is essential to particular traditions, they are simply new sectarian voices contesting the proper character and purpose of the traditions in question. Rather than escaping from confessional disagreements, they are directly involved in them, but the particular character of their claims is obscured by the rhetoric of neutrality.

The common ground strategy emerged in two stages: the first was the attempt to find a set of common fundamentals shared by all Christians; the second was the universal extension of this paradigm to all religions. Edward Herbert is taken as a representative of the second stage, and will be discussed in the third section. The next section discusses Hugo Grotius, however, as a representative of the first stage.

5.2 Hugo Grotius and the Ethical Common Ground

Hugo Grotius argued that a minimalist conception of Christianity was the most perfect realisation of religion as such. This claim was validated by the contribution that such a religion would make to peace and security of the commonwealth. This was the emergent peace of the state, rather than the Augustinian peace discussed previously. This argument is evident in two theological works in particular, which illustrate the way in which the common ground strategy pushes towards the identification and reification of supposed commonalities among religions as not merely contingent overlaps, but as belonging to a necessary core. They also illustrate how this strategy is not merely descriptive but normative – the suggestion is that this is not merely what religions share, but what true religion is in essence. These works are an early theological treatise, *Meletius, sive de iis quae inter Christianos conveniunt epistola* (which translates as *Meletius, or Letter on the Points of Agreement between Christians*),⁴⁰ and *De Veritatis Religionis Christianae* (*The Truth of the Christian Religion*).⁴¹ The former work, never published, was written in 1610, at a high point of tension between Calvinists and Arminians in the United Provinces, and Grotius explicitly acknowledged that it was occasioned by the violent animosities of religious division. The latter, which went through many editions in the seventeenth century, was first published

⁴⁰ Hugo Grotius, *Meletius, sive, De iis quae inter Christianos conveniunt epistola* trans. Guillaume Henri Marie Posthumus Meyjes (Leiden: Brill, 1988).

⁴¹ Hugo Grotius, *Of the Truth of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Clarke (London: William Baynes, 1829).

in its final form in 1640 and presents itself as a manual to aid Dutch sailors when they encountered pagans, Mahometans and Jews.

Notwithstanding these differences, the first work stands in relation to the second as a blueprint to a finished design, and the approach to Christianity, and religion in general is much the same. In the second work, Grotius defended the same views and the same message, albeit in a more detailed form.⁴² As Jan Paul Heering points out, Grotius began this work while in prison in the Netherlands, charged with 'disturbing the religious peace', and its overarching aims can be understood as being in continuity with *Meletius*.⁴³ In letters he wrote at the time, he likened schism to a sickness eating away at the body of Christ and revealed that he intended *De veritate* not only as a popular handbook for seafarers, but as a contribution to leading Christians away from unnecessary controversies and back to peace and unity.⁴⁴

The message developed in both works was a reaction to the historical circumstances of United Provinces in the early seventeenth century, in which controversy over religion seemed likely to precipitate the collapse of the Dutch republic.⁴⁵ Calvinism spread to the Low Countries in the second half of the sixteenth century, and in 1572 was officially adopted in the United Provinces, by then in the midst of a long struggle for independence from Spanish rule. As ground was gained, the Calvinists, who had been at the forefront of the violent resistance to the Catholic Spanish, were faced with the question of the extent to which religious diversity should be tolerated.⁴⁶

This debate had intensified by the time the truce with Spain was concluded in 1609. The presence of Catholics, Jews, and Protestant dissenters was a problem for established Calvinism, which had tended to prefer an ideal of spiritual and temporal unity in a confessional state. Those who considered themselves orthodox Calvinists demanded the suppression of deviant practices and beliefs; they were opposed, however, by the 'Remonstrant' followers of Jacobius Arminius, who preferred a more tolerant latitude in matters of faith. This rivalry went right to the centre of power in the United Provinces: Prince Maurice, *de facto* head of state, ultimately sided with strict Calvinism, whereas the

⁴² Grotius, *Meletius*, p. 63.

⁴³ J.P. Heering, *Hugo Grotius as Apologist for the Christian religion: a Study of his Work De veritate religionis Christianae, 1640*, trans. J.C. Grayson (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 64-69.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ For studies that locate Grotius' work in the context of contemporary political events see C.G. Roelofsen, 'Grotius and the International Politics of the Seventeenth Century', in Hedley Bull, Benedict Kingsbury, and Adam Roberts (eds.), *Hugo Grotius and International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, pp. 154-201.

⁴⁶ Timothy Samuel Shah, 'Making the Christian World Safe for Liberalism: From Grotius to Rawls', *The Political Quarterly* vol. 71, no. 1 (2000), p. 123; Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, pp. 179-181.

effective head of government Johan von Oldenbarneveldt sympathised with the Arminian position.⁴⁷

At this time Hugo Grotius was a close associate of Oldenbarneveldt, aligned with the Remonstrants against the Calvinists. In the years following the truce with Spain, Grotius followed the disputes between the Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants with growing concern.⁴⁸ And with good reason, as it turned out: during this period, the tide of opinion in the United Provinces turned against more tolerant Arminian faction, which was increasingly perceived as not only heterodox but subversive. When Prince Maurice seized the government in 1618, they were both arrested, tried, and found guilty of treason. Oldenbarneveldt was executed the following year, and Grotius was sentenced to life imprisonment, before escaping and eventually finding his way to Paris, where he spent most of the rest of his life.⁴⁹

The intersection of violence and religion was thus an uncomfortable reality for Grotius, and his writings on religion reflected this. While many of the ideas about religion he articulated drew on the Christian humanism of both Renaissance and post-Reformation thinkers such as Ficino and Erasmus, their persuasive potential was enhanced through the association of true religion and security. I shall examine here three dimensions of his treatment of religion: the emphasis on a common beliefs and ethical principles as a prerequisite of Christian peace; the relation between Christianity, the religions, and religion in general; and finally the relation between doctrine and ethics. In each of these dimensions, the argument for true religion and the argument for security is impossible to disentangle. Recognising the true nature of religion reveals the necessary condition for social peace and the remedy for confessional violence. For Grotius, defining religion is a project of security.

Ethics as a common ground

Grotius wrote *Meletius* expressly with the aim of overcoming the deleterious effects of Christian division. It was named after Meletius Pegas, a sixteenth-century Patriarch of Alexandria who had tried to construct an ecumenical union of Christians against the influence of Islam. In the essay, Grotius was concerned to demonstrate that what was

⁴⁷ Shah, 'Making the Christian World Safe for Liberalism: From Grotius to Rawls', p. 123; Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, pp. 181-184.

⁴⁸ Grotius, *Meletius*, p. 4.

⁴⁹ Shah, 'Making the Christian World Safe for Liberalism: From Grotius to Rawls', pp. 123-124; Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, p. 184.

most essential in Christianity was what all Christians shared in common, and that what Christians share in common is the fulfilment and culmination of religion as such. By recognising the true identity of this common denominator as their shared conviction, the warring parties will be reconciled in unity. The main content of the argument is bookended by an introduction and an epilogue, in both of which Grotius expounds his purpose in writing the work. He begins the introduction by noting the apparent paradox that ‘wars are started under no other pretext than that of the very religion whose purpose is peace’.⁵⁰

This strange fact formed the starting point for Grotius’ solution, which was to reassert the true nature of the Christian religion and free it from the needless disputes that had left it unable to fulfil its true role as the foundation of social peace. He also sought to subvert dominant assumptions about the relation between religious pluralism and political peace. For European Protestants and Catholics alike, religious uniformity was assumed to be the core of national unity. Grotius agreed with this perspective up to a point – religious peace must be rooted in a religious consensus. His innovation was to suggest that the heart of this consensus should not be the substantive doctrinal or ecclesiastical particularities of one church, but certain common fundamentals believed by all Christians.

He concluded *De Veritatis Religionis Christianae* with an exhortation to Christians, urging faithfulness, piety and above all unity, proposing that there ought to be ‘no sects or divisions’ amongst Christians.⁵¹ Because there were many doctrinal points likely to provoke disagreement yet beyond the possibility of human knowledge, Christians ought to ‘hold fast, and fulfil those things we are agreed in’.⁵² Christian peace would come about not only through focusing on what unites Christians, but on regarding those things in which Christians differed as being less essential: ‘No reason for discord could be more important that it would not be surpassed by that very reason for concord, to wit that that we follow a single teacher, indeed him who acknowledges no disciples but those who devote themselves to concord’.⁵³ We should reserve judgement on those things we disagree upon, Grotius was arguing, and strive instead to focus on those things that unite us. Grotius’ identification of a common ground shared by all Christians, and the representation of this common ground as the essential truth of Christianity, was an

⁵⁰ Grotius, *Meletius*, pp. 103-104.

⁵¹ Grotius, *Of the Truth of the Christian Religion*, pp. 245-246.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Grotius, *Meletius*, p. 104.

attempt to find a secure foundation within the Christian tradition from which the warring Churches and sects could be reconciled.

We can see here that the common ground strategy involved distinguishing between fundamentals of the faith that should command the assent of all major Christian confessions and matters which were 'indifferent' and could be left to individual conscience. This would become a common approach to ecumenicism in the seventeenth century. The basic principle of this strategy was expressed in the phrase, probably dating from the 1620s: 'In essentials, unity; in inessentials, liberty; in everything, charity'.⁵⁴ Selden's doublet-and-trimming theory of religion perhaps implied a certain disdain for those who spent their time arguing over the trimming. Numerous books and tracts appeared during the seventeenth century that sought to identify these essentials – the essence of 'the Christian Religion', 'the true Catholic Religion', 'the Protestant Religion', or simply 'Religion', which invariably signified the Christian faith.⁵⁵

Yet how one might determine those essentials was far from clear. The post-Reformation confessional disputes were not only struggles over what should be considered essential to the Christian faith, but over the criterion one might use to decide between competing versions of what was essential to the true faith.⁵⁶ As Richard Popkin has written, "To be able to recognise the true faith, one needed a criterion. But how was one to recognise the *true* criterion? The innovators and the defenders of the old were both faced with the same problem. They usually met it by attacking their opponents' criterion".⁵⁷ This was the 'rule of faith' controversy and it seemed to admit of no final resolution as it only begat the prior question of who or what authorises the decision on which criterion should be considered authoritative. It cannot straightforwardly be Scripture, because who but the Church decides that Scripture is authoritative? Yet how does one authorise the authority of the Church without slipping into an infinite regress, in which each authorisation itself demands a prior authorisation?

Grotius' cited a range of authorities in matters of religion. He regarded what was truly revealed and what was rational as being in accord. He frequently cites authorities from antiquity, but he is careful to test their wisdom against the testimony of the Old and New Testaments.⁵⁸ However, in determining which matters were essential and which

⁵⁴ Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation* (London: Penguin, 1964), p. 371.

⁵⁵ Harrison, "*Religion*" and *the Religions in the English Enlightenment*, pp. 25, 63.

⁵⁶ Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 1-17.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4. Italics in original.

⁵⁸ Grotius, *Meletius*, pp. 27-29.

were less important, he makes consensus the arbiter of essentials, thus of necessity reducing the core of essential Christian truth to what seemed immune to controversy and arguing that controversial doctrines were, by their very contested nature, less essential than those that were affirmed universally.

What did this common foundation look like? The account of true Christianity is intimately related to Grotius' explanation of the causes of religious violence, for he contended that violence resulted from a corruption of true form of religion. There were, for him, two fundamental aspects of religion: the theoretical and the practical. Religion is made up of theological doctrines (*decreta*) and practical-ethical rules (*praecepta*). Here we can note two of the traditional 'faculties' religion has been identified with, discussed in chapter 3, and observe that there is no role for the senses in Grotian religion (perhaps for what might be described as 'protestant reasons' – incense and iconography had no role to play here). More significantly, doctrines are represented as essentially ancillary to precepts, existing only to provide the will with direction. This distinction and relation applies not only to Christianity, but to religion as such:

Now religion, since it concerns action based on free choice, while all voluntary actions are preceded by the understanding, necessarily consists of two parts: the one theoretical, the other practical. The former is made up of dogmas, the latter of ethical precepts...In every practical science the principles [doctrines] should be neither irrelevant nor redundant, but should either incite to action or to some extent make clear what must be done and how it must be done.⁵⁹

This distinction is also the basis for Grotius' explanation of confessional violence. Noting that people invariably fight over doctrines rather than ethics, he proposes that controversy and disharmony arises through reversing the proper order of things, and privileging doctrines over ethics.⁶⁰ He quotes approvingly the Patriarch Meletius, who, according to Grotius, wrote on the same subject that 'It seems to me that the principle cause [of religious strife] is that the dogmas are declared to be the most essential part of the religion, whereas the ethical precepts are disregarded. Now this is altogether wrong, for dogmas generally subserve precepts and lead up to them'.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 109.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 133.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Through Meletius, Grotius is arguing here that once ethics is displaced from its rightful position at the heart of religion, conflict and discord are the result. There are two reasons Grotius supplies in support of this. The first is that ethical precepts are naturally less controversial, being plainer and more simple and thus more readily agreed upon. Indeed, Grotius argues that the ethical injunctions of the faith constitute shared and uncontested premises that define the boundaries of the dispute:

So the difference of opinions that is amongst Christians cannot hinder their agreement in the principal things; that is, those commands by which we have now recommended the Christian religion: and the certainty of these appears from hence, that those who, being highly enraged against one another, have sought for matter of disagreement, never ventured to go so far as to deny that these were the precepts of Christ; no, not even they that would not direct their lives according to this rule.⁶²

The second reason he supplies is that we fight over doctrines with others, whereas any battle over ethical precepts is internal. There is a human propensity, Grotius adds, to prefer controversies and debates to the fulfilment of obligations, because the former is easier than the latter. 'Because he is inclined to discharge his obligations as little as possible man has turned religion into a matter of controversy, and transferred to life what should have been a matter for discussion in the schools'.⁶³ Differences of doctrine, he argued, reflected a human preference for fighting over beliefs rather than living according to God's intentions, a preference rooted in the weakness of human nature and the clouding of judgement by prejudice.⁶⁴

The remedy for religious war is therefore to recover the right relation between doctrine and ethics, with the former existing solely to minister to the latter. Apart from a small number of doctrines that can be assented to on reasonable grounds,⁶⁵ ethical precepts are more self-evident than theoretical speculation in matters of religion. The focus on ethics provides a more secure and less controversial foundation for religion, because ethics 'have definite and unequivocal rules', and consequently excite far less

⁶² Grotius, *Of the Truth of the Christian Religion*, p. 111.

⁶³ Grotius, *Meletius*, p. 133.

⁶⁴ Grotius, *Of the Truth of the Christian Religion*, p. 110.

⁶⁵ Expounded in the third section of the *Meletius*. Grotius, *Meletius*, pp. 109-122.

controversy than doctrinal claims.⁶⁶ Grotius realises that in practice this means a more minimalist theology, in which necessary doctrines are limited to those required for ethics:

Many controversies over dogmas are merely due to words which must be avoided for consensus to appear. With any further quarrels we have to check whether they concern matters which it is necessary to know. At this point we have, first of all, to correct the error that more doctrines are formulated than ethics require.⁶⁷

He concludes that this is the only strategy that will circumvent the exclusive claims to truth which maintain Christian disunity:

The remedy for this disease will therefore consist in limiting the number of necessary articles of faith to those few that are most self-evident; and to inquire into the other doctrinal points which lead to the perfection of pious wisdom without prejudice, preserving charity and under the guidance of the Holy Scriptures.⁶⁸

The number of necessary doctrines should be limited to those that are most obvious, and anything beyond that should be judged according to its contribution to the fortification of ethics. In practice, Grotius seemed to believe that ethical principles could stand without any thick doctrinal hinterland. In the later work *De iure belli ac pacis* for example, those necessary doctrines were reduced to the belief 'that there is a Deity, (one or more I shall not now consider) and that this Deity has the Care of human Affairs'.⁶⁹

The solution to religious war was therefore to recover the right relation of doctrine and precept, emphasising the former as being of secondary importance to the latter. The common ground he was promoting here as the basis for intra-Christian consensus was one in which ethics is not only central, but regulative. What 'it is necessary to know' was limited to those doctrines that 'ethics require'.⁷⁰ Indeed, it was the ethico-security dimension that became the measure of the doctrinal: the truth of a doctrine was to be judged on its contribution to religious peace and social calm. Those that encouraged unrest and conflict could not be true, because truth was unimaginable

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 133.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 133-134.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, p. 194.

⁷⁰ Shah, 'Making the Christian World Safe for Liberalism: From Grotius to Rawls', p. 127.

without peace.⁷¹ This was not merely a pragmatic salve, for the return to a fundamentally ethical religion was represented as a return to the true nature of religion. There was therefore a close agreement between true religion and social peace.

It will be recalled that this was nothing new in Christian terms – social peace had always been the goal of Christian practice. But the peace to which Christianity contributed was no longer the Augustinian peace of reconciliation through the sacramental practices of the Church, but the emergent peace of the sovereign state. It reflected the seventeenth century belief, discussed in the last chapter, that while social peace was dependent on some kind of religion, and preferably on a single religion, insisting on the particularities of one confession was likely to undermine social order. This suggested the need for a minimalist religion shared by all that regulated conduct and motivated obedience to the law or even good works, while not providing excessive occasion for dispute and controversy. The common ground strategy can here be seen as fully consistent with the secularisation of security provision in the state.

The Grotian legacy of privileging ethical practice as the locus of inter-confessional agreement has been immensely influential, and is frequently rearticulated today among many who recognise the diversity and differences amongst doctrinal systems. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Tony Blair can be located amongst their ranks. There are considerable problems with assuming that while the religions may differ in their cultic attachments and doctrinal formulations, they substantially agree on orthopraxy. The difficulties here will be discussed in more detail in the final section of the present chapter. Grotius' emphasis on ethics anticipated the later collapse of confidence in the possibility of finding a doctrinal common core, but also one should note that in another respect he gestured back to an earlier Christian perspective. More recent attempts to found religious cooperation in a shared social practice have sought to include all faiths, and promoted the idea that this common moral core is shared equally among the religions. No religion is intrinsically any more ethical than another, it is argued. Grotius, however, sought a common ground only in the Christian tradition. Nevertheless, this common ground was represented as the most perfect realisation of religion as such. In this way, we cannot see some ways in which Grotius' account contributed to the new conceptualisation of religion as a genus.

⁷¹ Heering, *Hugo Grotius as Apologist for the Christian religion: a Study of his Work De veritate religionis Christianae*, 1640, pp. 72-73.

Religion, the religions and Christianity

It has been noted above that Grotius stands in between medieval and modern approaches to the concept of religion, straddling the transition between ‘the truth of Christian religion’ and ‘Christianity is *the* true religion’. He represents Christianity as a religion among other religions, yet also as the most perfect exemplar of religion. In refusing to reduce Christianity to the level of other religions, Grotius’s usage of the term remains indebted to the tradition revived by Marsilio Ficino, in which Christianity was one instance of a general type, albeit the most excellent expression.⁷² Nevertheless, he uses the plural concept of ‘religions’ which was unknown to Ficino, who had written of religion (in the singular), manifested in diverse forms of worship. Its perfection resided in its being the religion that is most capable of securing social peace. However, he combined this older Christian idea with the more modern conception of peace as guaranteed by the state rather than the practices of the Church. With only slight anachronism, it might be said that Christianity was the religion of national security.

Human activity is religious, for Grotius, if it pertains to belief in a beneficent God who rewards those who desire to please him.⁷³ This basic institution is ‘the most important thing in the world’, for it does what positive laws cannot achieve: it regulates human conduct, ensuring that human beings not only act but also think honestly and correctly.⁷⁴ While it is a potential source of dissension, it also grounds the possibility of society by providing a substantial motivation towards ethical conduct.

There is therefore a common factor that makes the religions religious – Christianity is *a* religion because it shares with other faiths this certain minimal content. ‘These are the principles by which the Christian religion has in common with all religions, the false ones and the true but less perfect ones, such as, in the first place, natural religion, and, next, the Mosaic religion’.⁷⁵ This generalised concept of religion has only a limited significance in the Grotian schema. The next section will discuss Edward Herbert’s inflation of a similar conception of natural religion as itself being the most perfect foundation of civil peace and a sufficient solution to ecclesiastical discord, emphasising strongly what the religions share in common. Grotius does not take this route, however, for he saw this minimalist conception of ‘religion in general’ as nothing more than an

⁷² Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, p. 39.

⁷³ Grotius, *Meletius*, p. 105.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

intimation and anticipation of Christianity, the most perfect religion. His common ground strategy focused finally on what Christians share in common because he held that Christianity was the logical sequel and culmination, the perfection and completion, of all that was best in the religions. It was the benchmark of true religion, against which other idolatrous pieties were revealed to be corrupt forms of orthodoxy. It preserved, validated and perfected all that was best in the paganism of the philosophers and the Hebraic tradition of the Jews, whilst adding truth unknown to those believers.⁷⁶

The implication of this is that religion in general could not therefore be an adequate foundation for a strategy of ecumenism, when a more perfect model of religion was available in the Christian conception. At the same time, though, the account of Christianity he put forward would, according to the logic of his position, provide a normative standard against which all religion could be measured. As has been noted, Grotius was not original in regarding Christianity as the most perfect realisation of a shared property of religiousness. The novelty of his account lies in the justifications given for this superiority. These were developed more fully in *De veritate religionis christianae*. In this work, Grotius employed two arguments that he believed could persuade non-Christians to convert.

The first can be briefly summarised as the proposal that Christianity was the most perfect expression of religion intellectually. The genuine nature of the revealed truths it added to the minimal natural religion could be known through historical evidence, the ease with which reason could accept its revealed truths, and its unusual consistency with the common doctrines at the heart of natural religion.⁷⁷ Christianity was the revealed faith most in harmony with natural religion.

The second, more important argument was that Christianity is the most perfect religion socially. This judgement was based on an analysis of the purpose of religion in general. The social function of religion was to shape conduct into forms appropriate to the needs of society. Christianity was more excellent than the other religions because it fulfilled this purpose better than the available alternatives.⁷⁸ Islam, for example, encouraged its adherents to propagate the faith through warfare, which could be demonstrated in general terms to be illegitimate. Judaism placed more store in the temporal rewards promised to God's chosen people than it did in life after death, about which it remained equivocal. This was a problem because eternal rewards were

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 32-33, 107-109.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 110; Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, p. 185.

⁷⁸ Grotius, *Of the Truth of the Christian Religion*, pp. 91-110. See also Grotius, *Meletius*, p. 119.

considered by Grotius to be the most important encouragement to good conduct in this life. Christianity not only avoided these pitfalls, but had a substantive contribution of its own to make, enjoining humility and a concern for the poor in the disposal of material goods.⁷⁹

The superiority of Christianity was evident from the goodness of its moral and social commands, and the consequent beneficial social effects. This point was already made in *Meletius*, where Grotius ended a section expounding the ethical injunctions of the true faith with a eulogistic paragraph highlighting the contribution of Christianity to justice, stability and peace. The passage associates Christianity with morality, civilisation, the rule of law, and the strength and stability of the state. The Christian religion gave morals and laws to barbarians, and abolished barbaric public games and slavery. In an idea that reflected the emergent mercantilist notion that the strength of the state was in the size of its population, one benefit of Christianity proposed was that it enabled people to ‘marry of their own free will and produce enough offspring to maintain the State’.⁸⁰ He ended with a flourish, claiming confidently that ‘if Christian life would answer to its name all over the world, we would live in a truly Golden Age, without wars, without quarrels, without poverty, in the greatest peace and harmony, an age of plenty for every single one of us’.⁸¹ Thus the superiority of Christianity resided in its greater compatibility with the strength, wellbeing and prosperity of the commonwealth.

We can summarise a number of ways in which the theme of peace was a dynamic force in Grotius’ discourse of ‘religion’, inciting discussion of what religion is and exercising a subtle but visible attraction on its form and content. First of all, in the most general sense, a concern with security pervades these works to such an extent that his discussion of religion can be described as a strategy of security. Security concerns were a stimulus for questioning the nature of religion. The idea that security might be pursued through locating a neutral space untouched by polemic and denunciation itself pushed the concept of religion in certain directions. Secondly then, and more specifically, a concern with civil peace shaped Grotius’ representation of the form and content religion should assume. It is important to note that it was a very particular conception of peace that informed Grotius’ strategy here. He regarded peace as secured by consensus, and threatened by controversy. The peace that Grotius had in mind was the emergent civil peace of liberalism that is the absence of physical violence rather than rightly ordered

⁷⁹ Grotius, *Meletius*, pp. 129-130; Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, p. 195.

⁸⁰ Grotius, *Meletius*, p. 132.

⁸¹ Ibid.

social relations characterised by love and forgiveness. It was a liberal peace in that it presupposed no particular conception of the good, beyond physical security. It was not essentially connected with the community of the Church and its sacramental practices, but simply involved a secure civic realm. This meant that peace could be sustained by a minimalist Christianity that required little in the way of specific doctrinal content. Indeed, to insist on the importance of too many doctrines was threatening to the domestic peace. There is therefore a politics *about* religion here, as religion had to restrict itself to a minimal, largely ethical content if it was to be compatible with the common good. There is also a politics *through* religion, as it was defined in terms that were too minimal to support any substantive social project that might rival that of the state.

Grotius argument that Christianity was necessary for social peace did not mean that he did not suppose that it was true. The coincidence of true religion and true security was a feature of the rational order created by a benevolent deity. For, as he notes when writing of the social benefits of religion, ‘the ruler in his great wisdom did not fail to institute those things that profit us most’.⁸² As John Stuart Mill later observed, arguments for the utility of religion only really became necessary once its truth was more widely doubted.⁸³

In Grotius’ schema, the concrete content of this institution was principally made known through revelation. It followed from this that the truth of the Christian faith exceeded all others. Yet there was another foundation for the common ground, the exploration of which would place Christianity on an equal footing with the other faiths. This was natural religion, or religion in general. Emphasising the sufficiency of religious truths available to the mind or written in the hearts of humankind without the intervention of particular historical revelation precluded the idea that any one positive, historical tradition could be regarded as uniquely endowed with the means of salvation. This was the line of reasoning pursued by Herbert of Cherbury, and it produced an even more recognisably modern concept of religion. While Grotius retained the belief that some religions were more religious than others, Herbert treated religion as a property possessed in equal measure by all religions. What Grotius had done for the multiple Christian religions – abstracting their essence as *the* Christian religion – Herbert did for all the religions of the world. And not only did he abstract ‘the essence of all those entities visible in the world of which the Christian religion could be thought to be an

⁸² Ibid., p. 107.

⁸³ Mill, *Three Essays on Religion*, p. 70.

example',⁸⁴ he made this lowest common denominator the measure of all claims to revelation, a universal standard that could be summoned when the positive, historical religions were brought before the judgement seat of mankind.

While Grotius abstracted the essence of 'the Christian religion' from the different varieties of that faith, Herbert would abstract a concept of 'religion' from 'the religions'. Nevertheless, the common ground strategy Herbert adopted would remain basically the same. The consequence of this was that the concept of 'religion' would inherit all the weaknesses implicit in the inter-Christian common ground strategy, but in a form made more acute by the greater diversity of 'the religions'. Yet it seems reasonable to speculate that this strategy appeared especially attractive in the early seventeenth century, due to the coincidence of two factors. One was the increasing awareness, through imperial expansion and exploration, of the diversity of rites and beliefs found in other parts of the world. The other was the extreme suspicion with which what would later be described as 'religious pluralism' was viewed at the time. As we have seen in the case of Grotius, the existence of a multitude of sects with competing truth claims did not only present an interesting philosophical problem, but a thorny political dilemma. When the diversity of non-Christian pieties was encountered against a background of Christian disunity in Europe, it was interpreted in the light of this historical experience. The violence that had accompanied the Protestant-Catholic divide and the proliferation of Protestant sects was not seen as a unique problem peculiar to one corner of the globe, for Christian Europe was viewed as a microcosm of a world characterised by potentially volatile religious division.⁸⁵ However, as the example of Herbert of Cherbury reveals, the expansion of the common ground strategy to encompass all religions was also generated in part by theological themes within the Christian tradition itself.

5.3 Edward Herbert: Universalising the Common Ground

Edward Herbert (from 1629 Lord Herbert) of Cherbury was probably the first to explicitly represent religion as an essence shared in equal measure by 'the religions', residing in a set of features common to all. The ideas Herbert propounded in his book *De veritate* (1624),⁸⁶ and developed subsequently in a number of works, mark the shift to an understanding of religion in terms of essential form and various outward expressions:

⁸⁴ Bossy, 'Some Elementary Forms of Durkheim', p. 6.

⁸⁵ Harrison, "Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment, pp. 7-8.

⁸⁶ Edward Herbert, *De veritate*, trans. Meyrick H. Carré (Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1937).

genus and species.⁸⁷ Ivan Strenski judges that the significance of Herbert's writing lies in its illustration of how 'the affairs of the world, such as religious warfare, produced shocks to the thinking of Western people that compelled them to think hard about the nature of religion. The quest for the first religion, for original religion – for Natural Religion – was thus a spur to thinking about religion as such'.⁸⁸ Herbert's construction of religion can be situated within the same general trajectory of humanist ecumenism that produced Grotius' theological ventures, but he differed in the solution he offered. Rather than locating the common ground in the basic features of a shared revelation, he argued for the universality of true religion based on a belief that God's goodness was such that he must have provided a universally available means to salvation. J. Samuel Preus describes his general attitude in these terms:

Armed with his faith in providence as God's greatest attribute, he faced the incredible variety of religions not with disdain but with a sense that all shared – beneath the accumulated "rubbish" of traditions – the same fundamental aim and intent, and could be reduced to the same essential meanings – meanings which corresponded to innate faculties of the mind. He exhibited a serene confidence that a merciful providence has endowed everyone with the necessary resources to make all essential religious judgements.⁸⁹

This quotation summarises a number of concerns that are evident in Herbert's work. *De veritate* was for the most part a treatise on truth, and a rebuttal of scepticism.⁹⁰ There were also strong humanist theological themes articulated in reaction to the prevalent Calvinist soteriology (doctrine of salvation) that excluded the majority of humanity from salvation and appeared to deny the justice and mercy of God.⁹¹

While both of these purposes are certainly present in Herbert's work, there are compelling grounds for understanding them in the context of a further preoccupation: a concern with religious peace and social stability. Through establishing a set of common

⁸⁷ Ward, *True Religion*, p. 58.

⁸⁸ Ivan Strenski, *Thinking About Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 25-26.

⁸⁹ J. Samuel Preus, *Explaining Religion: Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 23.

⁹⁰ For a discussion of this aspect of Herbert's work see Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, pp. 151-161. H.W. Blunt wrote of *De veritate* that it had 'the merit of being a purely philosophical book with a purely philosophic aim'. H.W. Blunt, 'The Philosophy of Herbert of Cherbury', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* vol. 1, no. 3 (1890), p. 123.

⁹¹ Treatments that emphasise the theological and especially soteriological concerns in Herbert's work include Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism*, pp. 22-37; Harrison, "Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment, pp. 61-73.

articles, sufficient for salvation and transparent to reason, Herbert sought a rational and neutral principle by which the confessional disputes of the time might be arbitrated and defused. The theological defence of God's unwavering benevolence towards humankind worked alongside the epistemological explorations of the reasoning capacities that provide access to the gift of salvation. Together they provided the intellectual support for the argument that there were certain religious truths that could be known independently of specific sectarian claims, and that these truths were sufficient to salvation. This, Herbert believed, would undermine confessional controversy, which was driven chiefly by exclusivist claims to salvation.⁹²

Some brief biographical considerations support this reading of Herbert's work. Like Grotius, Herbert was intimately acquainted with religious dispute. He fought on the side of the Prince of Orange against the Spaniards in 1610 and 1614, and was sympathetic to the cause of the Arminians against the Calvinists. The five years that he spent as James I's ambassador to France from 1619 would have acquainted him with the strife between Catholics and Huguenots in that country – struggles that intensified following the regicide of Henry IV in 1610 – and he was both familiar with the Dutch situation and deeply involved with the diplomatic manoeuvring in the early period of the Thirty Years War.⁹³ As Ronald Bedford notes, 'his knowledge of religious disputes was more than theoretical'.⁹⁴

During this time he was also moving in circles actively engaged in the search for solutions to the confessional strife of the period. On Herbert's first visit to France in 1608 he was introduced to, and spent some eight months as the guest of, the Montmorency family.⁹⁵ The Montmorencys had been at the heart of the *Politiques* faction in France from its earliest days, supporting a strong centralising monarchy and arguing for the necessity of toleration if France were to survive as a state.⁹⁶ Herbert was also acquainted with many of the leading lights of the emerging international ecumenical movement, who saw themselves transcending confessional differences through commitment to a common intellectual enterprise in the service of peace.⁹⁷ Grotius, for

⁹² In interpreting Herbert's work as primarily an eirenecist response to sectarian division, I am following R.D. Bedford, *The Defence of Truth: Herbert of Cherbury and the Seventeenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979).

⁹³ On Herbert's early life, see *Ibid.*, pp. 1-8.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 214-215.

⁹⁷ Susan Rosa, 'Religion in the English Enlightenment', *Eighteenth Century Studies* vol. 28, no. 1 (1994), p. 148; R.W. Serjeantson, 'Herbert of Cherbury Before Deism: The Early Reception of the *De Veritate*', *The Seventeenth Century* vol. 16, no. 2 (2001).

example, had warm praise for Herbert's *De veritate* and urged its publication.⁹⁸ Herbert's intellectual project was not only consistent with the general goals of this circle, it was fundamentally oriented by them. Bedford put it in these terms: 'The conclusion inexorably emerges that Herbert wrote *De veritate* for eirenic and reunionist purposes, that it was conceived not only as a philosophical and disinterested inquiry into modes of knowing but as a strategic weapon, directed to a readership of learned, discriminating and liberal philosophical minds, implied both in its Latin form designed to reach a European coterie, and in the gathered audience assembled by Herbert himself and by Mersenne, Hübner and others on his behalf and on behalf of the cause of religious peace'.⁹⁹

Salvation, security and the common notions

The general problem to which Herbert was responding was the violent political consequences of the confessional squabbles of the age. But this situation was not problematised as the consequence of the illegitimate and divisive presence of 'religion' in 'politics', or the elevation of doctrine above ethics. The roots of the conflict lay, Herbert supposed instead, in the existence of a plurality of competing religious groups, all claiming to control exclusively the means of salvation. This claim was based on the presumption that truth exclusively resided in the doctrines and practices of one church. Exclusivist claims about salvation became a civil liability when they were combined with the generally-shared conviction that pious civil government could not tolerate error and ignorance but should correct and mould those who had strayed from the truth. The claim that truth was to be found solely in the creeds or rites of a particular confession became a justification for persecution and war.¹⁰⁰ Rather than arguing that the state should keep out of religion, Herbert sought to reform the claims of the confessions themselves.

His position was essentially the same as that of Rousseau, who would later write that 'It is impossible to live in peace with people one believes to be damned; to love them would be to hate the God who punishes them; it is an absolute duty either to redeem or torture them'.¹⁰¹ It is not uncommon to encounter today the idea that religious peace depends on reforming the soteriological claims of the various traditions in a more

⁹⁸ Bedford, *The Defence of Truth: Herbert of Cherbury and the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 4, 212-215.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 136. The same conclusion can be found in Preus, *Explaining Religion*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁰ Preus, *Explaining Religion*, pp. 24-28. The controversial nature of soteriology in this period perhaps explains why Grotius was unwilling to be drawn on the subject, and made it no part of his discussions of the essence of true religion. Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, p. 195.

¹⁰¹ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, p. 186.

inclusive direction. Charles Kimball, for example, has recently written that ‘The rigid exclusivism embodied in the view that “Christianity is the only truth”...is the foundation for a tribalism that will not serve us in the twenty-first century’.¹⁰²

His strategy was to affirm the salvific sufficiency of religion in general – the abstractable essence of the religions. By proposing that the means of salvation were available universally and resided in a simple and ethical religion, he sought to show that theological dispute over fine doctrinal points was not only harmful but wholly unnecessary. If it could be demonstrated that religious truth was universally available, the rationale for religious war – the grounds on which competing sects had damned each other – would dissolve. His confidence that such a body of truths did exist and were affirmed universally rested on the theological conviction that God, in his benevolence, must have provided a universally available means of salvation. From the benevolence of God it could also be deduced that these essential truths must be knowable; he therefore proposed that God had ordained a liberal and equitable distribution of truth throughout the world. But how might they be known? It would not do, he insisted, to abandon human reason and trust without question in the infallible judgement of priests and pontiffs, for these external authorities ‘may be equally used to establish a false religion as a true one’.¹⁰³ Neither should one accept claims to special revelation at face value, for ‘every religion which proclaims a revelation is not good, nor is every doctrine which is taught under its authority always essential or even valuable. Some doctrines due to revelation may be, others ought to be, abandoned’.¹⁰⁴ Herbert asserted instead that truth is available to human beings through their natural rational faculties, and through discernment of what is universally believed. He claimed that he himself, in arriving at the essential truths of religion through relying ‘only on truths which are not open to dispute but are derived from the evidence of immediate perception and admitted by the whole world’.¹⁰⁵

There were therefore two ways that truth in religion could be discerned, according to Herbert: inner apprehension and universal consensus. With regard to the first of these, he proposed that human beings are equipped by God with an innate religious sense; the fundamental ideas of religion emerge as experience is interpreted through these innate faculties. The religious sense embodied in these faculties tends,

¹⁰² Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, p. 28.

¹⁰³ Herbert, *De veritate*, p. 289.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 298.

through its conjunction with the data of experience, to produce the worship of God through ethical and virtuous behaviour, a penitent attitude when we fail and an awareness of reward or punishment in the afterlife. These faculties are reliable critical instruments for discriminating the true from the false in claims to truth in matters of religion, whether these claims are backed up by the authority of Scripture, tradition, or the Church.¹⁰⁶ In *De veritate*, the elaboration of the common notions concerning religion followed the development of a distinctive theory of knowledge. Herbert argued that the human mind possessed a natural predisposition to adhere to these religious truths. Their truth is validated not through appeal to tradition, the authority of a Church, or written and oral records of alleged revelations, but through introspection.¹⁰⁷ The authority by which true religion is validated is wholly internal. Herbert was profoundly suspicious of external claims to authority, which can lead not only to all kinds of deceptions and manipulations, but to an escalation of violence. When people are too ready to accept external authorities in distinguishing between true and false claims to authentic revelation, 'they become incapable of using their own faculties; and not having the heart to confront the terrors with which they are threatened, they fall back on fear and hate'.¹⁰⁸

Alongside the internal standard of religious truth, there is a second that is equally important and perhaps more interesting. While right use of one's reasoning faculties was a reliable guide to truth, in there is another norm that ultimately validates a belief: that of consensus. 'I maintain that universal consent, (which has not been established without the aid of divine providence) is in the last resort the sole test of truth'.¹⁰⁹ Like Grotius then, Herbert posited truth as residing in those doctrines and precepts that were affirmed by all. There are noteworthy differences though. For Herbert it was not only all Christians, but all human beings among whom consensus was sought, and they differed also over the question of *why* consensus was itself an indicator of truth. Neither, it should be remembered, considered consensus as simply a pragmatic condition of 'moving forward'. While Grotius believed consensus to be ultimately validated by the peace it created, it can be seen in the last quote that Herbert regarded consensus as a measure of truth because God, in his benevolent desire to act for the good of humanity, has made the knowledge necessary to salvation universally available. It follows from this that

¹⁰⁶ Preus, *Explaining Religion*, pp. 28-29.

¹⁰⁷ Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism*, p. 30; Harrison, "Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment, p. 67.

¹⁰⁸ Herbert, *De veritate*, p. 117. Quoted in Preus, *Explaining Religion*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁹ Herbert, *De veritate*, p. 118. Quoted in Preus, *Explaining Religion*, p. 30.

religious truth can be identified through discovering the fundamental matters on which religions agree. As Herbert put it,

Religion is a common notion; no period or nation is without religion. We have, then, to search for what is by universal consent acknowledged in religion and compare these universal principles with each other; and what is universally acclaimed as religious truth must be recognised as Common Notions. Such a proceeding may be deemed laborious, but there is no other way by which the truths of common notions can be ascertained.¹¹⁰

The upshot of divine providence was that beneath the ‘Heaps of Ethnical Superstitions, a Thread of Truth might be found’ in the religions of the world.¹¹¹ This thread was a factual consensus that existed amongst the religions as to what was ultimately important. He concluded that there were five key beliefs that were universally known and present in all religions, called the ‘catholic articles’ or ‘common notions’. They can be summarised as proposing (1) that there is a supreme God; (2) that this sovereign deity ought to be worshipped; (3) that virtue and piety are the most important dimensions of religious practice; (4) that we should repent of our sins; and (5) that there is an afterlife in which conduct in this life will be rewarded or punished.¹¹² They were arrived at through reducing the data to a common core, as Herbert observed: ‘To these truths...all the wonders of individual religions reduce themselves when analysed, that he [the inquirer] will scarcely substitute anywhere a remoter purpose; and especially every eminently sane dogma of theology, or what holiest sacrament of the Church you will, tends nowhere else when reduced to its final elements’.¹¹³ The common notions were extracted by Herbert from an examination and comparison of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, the religion of the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Chinese as well as the East and West Indians, and were, he claimed, universally taught by these faiths and neither questioned nor doubted of.¹¹⁴ ‘The system of Notions, so far at least as it concerns theology, has been clearly accepted at all times by every normal person, and does not require any further justification’.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Herbert, *De veritate*, p. 121. Quoted in Preus, *Explaining Religion*, p. 29.

¹¹¹ Herbert, *The Antient Religion of the Gentiles, and Causes of their Errors Consider'd*, p. 3.

¹¹² Herbert, *De veritate*, pp. 291-303.

¹¹³ *De religione laici* (1645), quoted in Preus, *Explaining Religion*, pp. 29-30.

¹¹⁴ Ward, *True Religion*, p. 57.

¹¹⁵ Herbert, *De veritate*, p. 291.

In practice these two standards – the internal and the inductive – function together in a circular fashion in Herbert's work. On the one hand, the universal consensus allegedly revealed by the data proves the innateness of the common notions. On the other hand, the theory of innate common notions makes it natural to assume the existence of a common ground universally shared, even where the evidence for this was inconclusive or lacking.¹¹⁶ The apparent absence of the common notions in certain cultures and historical periods could then be explained away in terms of the internal or external corruption of the reasoning faculties, through madness or 'priestcraft'. For this reason, Herbert introduced the important qualification that 'it is not what a large number of men assert, but what all men of *normal* mind believe, that I find important'.¹¹⁷ And he explained religious diversity, and the embarrassing fact that no nation seemed ever to have held solely to the five common notions, in terms of priestly imposition. The corruption of the true religion of mankind could be accounted for by supposing that priests, who could be found in every religion, had thwarted the natural religious predispositions of the laity, turning religion into a system for multiplying their advantages.¹¹⁸ This would become a common trope in later deist writing, whose dominant theme was anticlericalism.

We can see from this discussion how two of Herbert's central preoccupations formed components of his common ground strategy of security. His attempt to formulate a rational method for discovering truth and his desire to defend the justice of God were important aspects of his search for a universal essential religion, a quest that was driven by an eirencist desire for peace and unity. Herbert's work did, of course, participate in more general philosophical conflicts over the criteria for truth and the possibility of certain knowledge that arose in the wake of the 'rule of faith' controversy and the revival of scepticism in the sixteenth century.¹¹⁹ His work can be understood as part of the philosophical reaction to scepticism that sought new, more certain foundations of knowledge, a movement of which Descartes would soon afterwards become the standard-bearer. But as Stephen Toulmin has demonstrated, this broader movement was itself impelled and made attractive by the desire for security.¹²⁰ Within Herbert's own project, the defence of human reason was necessary to sustain the claim

¹¹⁶ Preus, *Explaining Religion*, p. 29.

¹¹⁷ Herbert, *De veritate*, p. 301.

¹¹⁸ Harrison, "Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment, p. 72.

¹¹⁹ See Bedford, *The Defence of Truth: Herbert of Chertsey and the Seventeenth Century*, pp. 26-62; Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*.

¹²⁰ Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*.

that saving knowledge was not restricted to that small portion of humanity that had encountered the institution of the Christian Church or the Scriptures. As Harrison comments, 'when we consider how much of Herbert's general epistemological speculation finds specific application to the issue of religious knowledge, it seems most probable that the principal aim of *De veritate* was to provide the formal basis for conjectures about the essence of religion'.¹²¹ This conclusion finds circumstantial corroboration in the observation that Herbert did not return to the theme of truth in his later works, concentrating instead on defending and expanding his account of the common notions of religion.

Herbert's work also contained frequent broadsides against Calvinism, whose doctrine of predestination represented salvation as restricted to the elect who were foreordained to eternal life. For many Calvinists, there were some to whom salvation simply wasn't available and one could only hope to be numbered among the elect.¹²² Herbert railed against this doctrine for its image of God as the author of an unjust dispensation, an arbitrary tyrant who was also by extension responsible for the evil of predestining the majority of mankind to damnation.¹²³ This was no scholastic dispute (in the most pejorative sense), for religious conflict was in part the outworking of these assumptions about God through exclusivist doctrines of salvation, and Herbert's solution of the common ground hung on his defence of the notion of a benevolent God concerned for the salvation of all.

The purpose served by 'religion'

The theorisation of 'religion in general' can therefore be said to be the objective of Herbert's common ground strategy. A number of points should be made about the nature and function of this common essence. In the first place, there is the important point that while Herbert set out to defuse hatred and intolerance by identifying the good in every religion, 'every religion, if we consider it comprehensively, is not good'.¹²⁴ The common notions were drawn from within each religion, but religions add numerous additional and peculiar features. Some of these deviated from the common ground, and to the extent that they did they could not be considered true or efficacious for salvation:

¹²¹ Harrison, "Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment, p. 66.

¹²² Ibid., p. 27.

¹²³ Herbert summarises his views on the matter in Herbert, *The Antient Religion of the Gentiles, and Causes of their Errors Consider'd*, pp. 1-7.

¹²⁴ Herbert, *De veritate*, p. 302.

‘Every Church...is the more exposed to error the further it is separated from it’.¹²⁵ The common notions thus provided a standard against which all particular religions could be judged – when a belief or doctrine comes into conflict with the common notions, by positing a plurality of Gods or denying the eternal nature of the soul for example, it could be judged false. Whatever else one believes, one must believe this. Herbert maintained a distinction between true and false religion, but redrew it *through* each religion rather than *between* them.

Of course, this point becomes more significant when we note that the common notions Herbert identified bear too much resemblance to Christianity to be convincing as an account of what is universally shared by all religions. The specificities of Christianity had no role to play – as Ward notes, ‘the significance of the life of Christ (incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection), the doctrines of the triune God and the sacraments of grace were only secondary truths, to be understood metaphorically as particular expressions of underlying universals’.¹²⁶ The Church, liturgy, and the role of priests, the disciplining and formation of followers that had traditionally been central to the faith were at best unnecessary and at worst distortions of the true religion, which was written in the hearts of humanity. Yet the fundamental role of Christianity in defining the identity of the common notions means that the paradigm embodies a covert Christianisation of religion itself.

In the second place, true religion is minimal in character. Herbert does not reject all addition to the common ground, but their value is strictly circumscribed:

I do not deny that sacred ceremonies can form part of religion; on the contrary I find that some ceremonies are included in every religion and serve to embellish it; so far they are valuable. But when they are made by the priests the essential elements of divine worship, then religion, and we who practice it, are the victims of imposture. Rites must be kept within bounds. We can only accept them on the understanding that religion is chaste and only requires such ornaments as to render a matron more venerable and respected. When she paints and dyes herself, her appearance is too suggestive of the harlot.¹²⁷

Aside from Herbert’s denunciation of the painted embellishments of the Roman Church, the interesting feature of this colourful passage is the proper attitude he was proposing to

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 303.

¹²⁶ Ward, *True Religion*, p. 58.

¹²⁷ Herbert, *De veritate*, p. 303.

specific elaborations of religion. Other additions and innovations could be accepted, as long as they were regarded as optional and were kept to a minimum. According to the logic of Herbert's reasoning, what was not universal could not be regarded as essential. All particular historical faiths were effectively reduced to a homogenous core with differences that could only legitimately be superficial at best.

The third point to note is that religion was represented by Herbert as combining a propositional dimension, but with a practical dimension that is fundamentally ethical in nature. The similarities to Grotius' conception are striking. The doctrinal content was minimal, and, as with Grotius, doctrines were only warranted to the extent that they 'promote universal peace and concord, and make for purity of life'.¹²⁸ Doctrines could be added to the common notions, but only insofar as they promote universal peace and do not place contentious restrictions and conditions on salvation.¹²⁹ Ultimately though, believing certain propositions is not enough. Salvation is not simply dependent on affirmation of the common notions, but their practical application in the living of a virtuous life. As Herbert comments, 'how could anyone who believes more than is necessary, but does less than he ought, be saved?'¹³⁰ True religion is not simply a matter of recognising the form of the virtuous life and its necessity, but of actually living it.¹³¹

Significantly, as Graham Ward has pointed out, the virtuous life required by true religion was also the means by which civil peace and stability was guaranteed. Herbert identified what he believed to be the law of 'closest agreement concerning religion or civil and political justice'.¹³² Virtue made true religion essentially the same as civil and political justice. Vice was connected with strife and violence within and without, whereas the fruit of religious virtue was both inner tranquillity and civic harmony:

there be noe man that is given to Vice That doth not finde much Opposition
both in his owne Conscience and in the Religion and Lawe as taught elsewhere,
And This I dare say That a vertuous man may not onely goe securely through all
the Religions but all the Lawes in the world and whatsoever obstructions he
meete obtayne both an Inward peace and outyward wellcome among all with
whom hee shall negotiate or Converse.¹³³

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 304.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 306.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 302.

¹³¹ Harrison, *"Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*, p. 70.

¹³² Quoted in Ward, *True Religion*, p. 56.

¹³³ Quoted in Ibid. Spelling, grammar and punctuation in the original.

Like that of Grotius, the conception of true religion articulated by Herbert is, unsurprisingly, basically conservative: too thin in substance to provide an alternative account of social and political life, and centred on an ethical core whose purpose was to encourage outward conformity to the moral code. In this regard, it was typical of the kind of religion preferred by the emerging liberal political science – lacking controversial confessional specificity, but retaining the notion of a deity with powers to punish and reward. It was a conception of religion that was incapable of offering resistance to the emergent autonomous rationality of the state, because its minimalism could offer no substantive alternative. Religion was being conformed here to the perceived requirements of security, as defined by the new ‘political science’ paradigm in which the state maintained the peace through enforcing obedience to the law.

Herbert’s strategy extended and completed that of Grotius, in that he took the project of identifying a certain minimal shared content among different Christian confessions and extended it universally. The religions were now equally instances of religion, rather than religion being something that was found most perfectly in Christianity. The argument that the common notions were essential and sufficient for salvation fed into the idea that these features were what was most fundamental about each tradition – they make each tradition what it *is*, which is now a ‘vehicle’ for religion itself.

Chapter 3 argued that the project of searching for common features in the extant religious traditions has failed, raising the question of why the supposition that there were such features gained such widespread credence. This chapter has argued that an answer can be provided – at least in part – if one attends to the role of peace and security concerns in the early modern period. The idea that there was a common denominator uniting the religions was a product of very specific historical circumstances. The immediate problem was that of intra-Christian conflict, but solutions were sought in an age when: (1) Europe was viewed as a microcosm of the world; (2) religious agreement was believed necessary for domestic stability; (3) the Christian inheritance made it axiomatic that the purpose of religion was social peace; and (4) peace and security were now guaranteed by strong states rather than participation in the sacramental practices of the Church. These circumstances together made possible to conceive of a small core of religious beliefs and ethical principles that would command the allegiance of all Christians, or all theists, against which all other beliefs and practices could be relativised as indifferent matters. This core had to contribute to peace, but it could take a minimalist

and inclusive form because the goal was the peace of the state rather than that of the Christian community. The supposition that Europe was a microcosm of the world sanctioned the universal projection of this solution.

5.4 Problems of the Common Ground

The common ground strategy contributed to the production of a new concept of religion as a genus. Just as scholars have continued to search for the elusive common factor in the religions, the idea that inter-religious tensions can best be mitigated by emphasising a shared ground as a basis for coexistence and cooperation has also persisted. It will be argued in the next chapter that this assumption informed Tony Blair's engagement with Islam during his time as British Prime Minister. There are serious problems with this approach though, some of which are related to points already raised in chapter 3. It is not only generalisations about religion and violence that often depend on the notion that religion is a genus, but also attempts to mitigate violence by building on a common ground. It is significant that such efforts persist, because not only are they politically problematic in their unacknowledged exclusions, but they reinforce the supposition that religion is a genus and may yet contribute to the further constitution of and shaping of real-world 'religious' phenomena. Just as the differentiation strategy placed discursive limits on the concrete forms religion could take, the common ground strategy makes prescriptions about how believers should understand their own traditions. There is therefore a politics *about* religion, in which the self-understanding of the various traditions and the way they can legitimately be expressed is being fought over. There is also a politics *through* religion, for just as in the work of Grotius and Herbert, the common ground privileged in these more recent approaches has been one in which religion is rendered compatible with liberal projects of security.

The common ground strategy had taken on two different aspects by the turn of the twenty-first century, one of which can be seen to be continuing the Grotian legacy while the other repeats themes first articulated by Herbert. The former attempts to root cooperation in shared social and ethical commitments, while the latter theorises the religions as equally true and equally efficacious for salvation whilst mythologising their actual doctrinal claims. The rest of this section will discuss some problems with the common ground as a basis for interfaith encounter, beginning with these two more recent modes of interreligious cooperation.

The common ground: the contemporary legacy

Those who can be said to be continuing Herbert's legacy have largely abandoned hope that one can locate any extant common features in the doctrines and self-understandings of the religions. They are still regarded as manifestations of a common phenomenon, but their diverse beliefs and practices were now conceived as pointing towards the same divine realm (or the real/transcendent/ultimate where 'the divine' is considered to be too theistic). This meant that the exclusive claims of any one tradition to have a unique handle on the truth or embody the only path to salvation must be denied. Indeed, these claims to unique superiority such as the Christian claim that there is no salvation outside of the Church are represented by pluralist theologians such as John Hick as being the source of much historical evil, just as Herbert had.¹³⁴ Not only the Christian religion, but 'the claims of other religions to absolute validity and to a consequent superiority have likewise, given the same human nature, sanctified violent aggression, exploitation, and intolerance'.¹³⁵

The remedy for this is not, as it had been for Herbert, adopting a set of common doctrines. It is now, in a move that echoes the ever-greater abstraction of definitional efforts discussed in chapter 3, the acknowledgement that the discourses of the religious traditions are different ways of symbolising 'ultimate Reality'. In Hick's account, the religious traditions radiate from the truth like the spokes of a wheel, but their particular truth claims are mythological rather than having any purchase on the reality they describe in diverse theistic and non-theistic ways. This calls for the extant historical religious traditions to amend their self-understandings in recognition of this common orientation towards the divine, which provides a shared ground sustaining dialogue. Mutual enrichment of all traditions is possible as each seeks to understand the other's perspective on what is beyond all particular creeds and formulations. Thus Oliver McTernan has written that to overcome the global problem of religious violence, 'religious leaders need to embark on "an adaptive leap" that will require them to re-

¹³⁴ See also the quotations from Rousseau and Kimball on the same subject above.

¹³⁵ Hick, 'The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity', p. 17. For a succinct critique of Hick's standpoint see Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 9-12. Hick's ideas have been influential, attracting the criticism of Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) while he was head of the Catholic Church's doctrinal commission, for their mythologisation of beliefs about Christ, and denial of the importance of the Church. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, 'Relativism: The Central Problem for Faith Today' (paper presented at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with the presidents of the Doctrinal Commissions of the Bishops' Conferences of Latin America Guadalajara, Mexico, 1996).

examine some of their own fundamental beliefs and loyalties', a leap that requires believers to 'curb the feelings of superiority and absolutism' through accepting that 'no single tradition is capable of comprehending the truth alone – in all its fullness'.¹³⁶

In order for more peaceful interfaith relations to emerge, believers must adopt a new orientation towards their own traditions. It is this common orientation to the truth as being something no single tradition possesses entirely that is shared in common. The difficult question here is why believers should accept this re-interpretation of their traditions. It makes the impossible claim to be able to stand back from all particular perspectives, relativising their truth claims and defining the proper relations between them, whilst putting forward its own particular claims about reality. It denies final truth to every perspective – except its own.¹³⁷

The Grotian idea that peace and interconfessional cooperation could best be achieved through privileging ethics as the least controversial dimension of religion would be taken up in the later seventeenth century by the Cambridge Platonists, in the eighteenth century by the deists and Kant,¹³⁸ and has found more recent expression in arguments that orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy provides the key to inter-religious cooperation. It will be argued in the next chapter that Tony Blair was firmly of this opinion, and it has been an influential paradigm among scholars as well.

American professor of religious studies Charles Kimball, for example, has written that 'Working together for the common good must be a major focus of interfaith dialogue in the years ahead. Christians and Muslims, for example, do not need to come to theological agreement before they can work hand in hand to meet the needs of the poor in their community or address issues such as equitable public education or the proliferation of drugs in society'.¹³⁹ Paul Knitter, a Catholic theologian of religions, combines the experiential and ethical dimensions in his argument that

Instead of searching for 'one God' or 'one Ultimate' or a 'common essence' or a 'mystical center' within all religions, we can recognise a *shared locus of religious experience* now available to all the religions of the world. Within the struggle for liberation and justice with and for the many different groups of oppressed

¹³⁶ McTernan, *Violence in God's Name: Religion in an Age of Conflict*, p. 161. For another argument that exclusivist claims about salvation are regressive and conflict-prone, see Falk, 'A Worldwide Religious Resurgence in an Era of Globalisation and Apocalyptic Terrorism'.

¹³⁷ Gavin D'Costa, 'Author's Response', *Reviews in Religion and Theology* vol. 8, no. 3 (2001), p. 248.

¹³⁸ Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism*, pp. 52-140; Harrison, "Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment, pp. 28-98; Kant, 'Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason'.

¹³⁹ Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, p. 209.

persons, believers from different traditions can experience together, and yet differently, that which grounds their resolves, inspires their hopes, and guide their actions to overcome injustice and to promote unity.¹⁴⁰

Knitter suggests that this approach provides a better account of the data generated by comparative religion, which has revealed that while 'the Ultimate' is conceptualised in radically divergent ways ('theistic, metatheistic, polytheistic, atheistic'), the concern of most religions is for liberation rather than speculation about a divine liberator.¹⁴¹ Another theologian, Hans Küng, has argued for the identification of 'a minimally basic consensus relating to binding values, irrevocable standards, and moral attitudes, which can be affirmed by all religions despite their "dogmatic" differences'.¹⁴² A similar affirmation of a shared moral core was made by a meeting of the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1993.¹⁴³ Scott Thomas has also argued that 'it is now time to identify the common core of ethical principles contained in the main world religions which are meaningful for international relations'.¹⁴⁴

It should be noted that the appeal to 'ethics' is not unproblematic as a common ground though. First of all, Grotius and more recent advocates of an ethical common ground assume that doctrine can be separated from ethics. A theoretical objection to the idea that ethics can be separated from doctrine has already been raised in chapter 3 – ethical practices are always passed on through reasoning about their purpose and proper mode of performance, and even practical and nonreflective performance always embodies some mode of reasoning. Stanley Hauerwas, in his genealogy of the relationship between doctrine and ethics, argues that the supposition that they could be separated was a modern development engendered to a significant extent by the sharp distinctions between faith and works that were bandied around in the Lutheran Reformation.¹⁴⁵ For Hauerwas, and for other theologians, it is a mistake to suppose that

¹⁴⁰ Knitter, 'Towards a Liberation Theology of Religions', p. 186.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 187.

¹⁴² Hans Küng, 'A Global Ethic in World Politics - A Middle Way Between Real Politics and Ideal Politics', *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* vol. 13, no. 1 (1999), p. 5. For a study that draws on Küng's work in international politics, see Hasenclever and Rittberger, 'Does Religion Make a Difference? Theoretical Approaches to the Impact of Faith on Political Conflict'.

¹⁴³ Parliament of the World's Religions, 'Declaration Toward a Global Ethic', http://www.weltethos.org/dat_eng/index5_e.htm, accessed 10 July 2007. For a study on peace and conflict that draws on Küng's work see Hasenclever and Rittberger, 'Does Religion Make a Difference? Theoretical Approaches to the Impact of Faith on Political Conflict'.

¹⁴⁴ Thomas, 'Taking Religious and Cultural Pluralism Seriously: The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Society', p. 839.

¹⁴⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, 'On Doctrine and Ethics', in Colin E. Gunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

theology and ethics are separate realms that can be considered in isolation. Gavin D'Costa points out in a similar fashion differences of doctrine cannot be bypassed, because reasoning about ethics is always done in the context of a broader tradition. He observes that Knitter 'fails to account for the way in which the paradigmatic and normative sources of a tradition shape the understanding of what "the human condition" is and what it ought to be, and what constitutes "liberative" actions. Hence, "promoting human welfare" is an unhelpful common denominator, as it specifies nothing in particular until each tradition defines the terms'.¹⁴⁶

One must attend more closely the actual social forms religions have advocated and taken, then, but here we encounter again the problem identified in chapter 3. The social and ethical orientations of the world religions do not seem any more unified than their doctrinal content. As Milbank has argued, the range of social projects projected as ideal by the various religious traditions make it highly doubtful whether they are really commensurable: the religious community may coincide with the political community (Islam), retain a relative independence of specific political associations and class divisions (Christianity and Buddhism), or it may involve a caste system whilst eschewing a unified religious community (Hinduism).¹⁴⁷ This can be connected directly with the discussion of various Augustinian and liberal peace projects discussed in the last chapter. What it meant to pursue peace as a medieval Augustinian was derived from the ontological and theological discourses of Trinitarian Christianity, and differed from what it would mean to seek peace as a Roman pagan or a seventeenth century Hobbesian. The diversity of social formations promoted by the various traditions undermines the presumption that there is a common sphere of social practice untouched by or indifferent to the doctrinal diversity of the faiths. The uniqueness of the various religious traditions is manifest at least as much in their social projects as in their cultic dimensions, and hence the theorisation of justice, unity and peace will differ accordingly.

If the proposed common ground leaves genuine differences of perspective untouched, the illusion that different groups have essentially the same approach will only obscure conflicts that demand difficult yet necessary negotiation. On the other hand, if the common ground is accepted, the level of generality required to secure a real consensus on controversial issues seems likely to effect unity but at a high price: through the propagation of commonalities that are little more than banalities. Peace can be

¹⁴⁶ D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions*, p. 17. Ratzinger made a similar criticism of Knitter. Ratzinger, 'Relativism: The Central Problem for Faith Today'.

¹⁴⁷ Milbank, 'The End of Dialogue', pp. 178-179.

purchased through replacing the distinctive identity of a tradition with a shallow and facile commitment to uncontroversial universals with a content that must forever remain under-specified if it is to continue to command universal allegiance.

This is not a problem, of course, when the meaning of terms such as peace, justice and freedom and their normative mode of realisation are defined by the discourses of the liberal state and the capitalist market. Here, we can note that the common ground of 'practice' within the religions easily slides into the independent security ethic discussed in the last chapter. When it is supposed that there can be a confessionally-neutral discourse of peace, the common ground that is discovered becomes a shared *motivation* to work towards this objective, whose content is defined essentially independently. Religion is here little more than a source of moral energies for believers – in the words of Knitter quoted above, it 'grounds their resolves, inspires their hopes'.¹⁴⁸

It will be argued in the next chapter that this is very much how Blair described the role of faith in the twenty-first century. He approached the discourses of particular traditions as the outward garb of a more purely human commitment to welfare defined in liberal capitalist terms. There is clearly a politics *through* religion here, for when one emphasises the practical peace- and justice-oriented dimensions of religion whilst denying that their meaning might be tradition-specific, the content of these concepts will in practice be supplied by hegemonic social definitions. The implication will then be that the religions are fulfilling their proper social role when they are working within the existing order to ensure its smooth functioning. If we note the inseparability of the doctrinal and ethical aspects of traditions, though, there is also a politics *about* religion here. Subordinating the communal projects of religious traditions to those of the state and the market will undermine the habitual modes of practice and social organisation that embody the logic and characteristic modes of reasoning of the tradition itself. Religions are, as Milbank comments, 'subject to subtle extinction' because they are affected by the vagaries of political and social processes rather than existing in a pristine realm of non-rational belief or experience.¹⁴⁹

Whose common ground?

¹⁴⁸ Knitter, 'Towards a Liberation Theology of Religions', p. 186.

¹⁴⁹ Milbank, 'The End of Dialogue', p. 178.

One can raise more general concerns about the project of defining a common ground. The first of these is that the common ground strategy merely displaces conflict rather than undercutting it. It cannot provide a genuinely neutral perspective, yet it must conceal its particular choices in order to maintain the pretence that stands outside all particular confessional disputes. At the same time, this concealment can foreclose the possibility of a genuine response by excluding from the discussion the contingent choices on which it rests.¹⁵⁰ The claim here is not that there is a less partial, less ideological mode of seeking agreement among different traditions. It is simply that common ground perspectives cannot be privileged on the basis that they are less sectarian than those generated by particular religious traditions. Taking actual consensus as the benchmark of essentials in matters of religion was one among a number of possible modes of encounter between different faith perspectives, and it is not self-evidently the best. The major problem is the inconsistent use of consensus as a standard of truth.

Both Grotius and Herbert sought to found religious peace on an ideal of consensus, by including only those doctrines that were uncontroversially agreed upon. The common ground strategy was justified with a rhetoric of impartiality, of mediating competing perspectives by subtracting the aspects of the faith that are contentious to isolate a core accessible to all Christians or people of all faiths. Yet it cannot sustain its claim to impartiality, as it constitutes instead a particular version of a tradition, or a particular version of religion as such. The discourse of the common ground can only appear neutral and impartial by concealing the particular and local premises on which it depends for its functioning. Common ground strategies are thus not really talking about what they purport to be talking about. While their professed purpose is to discover a neutral and impartial consensus shared by the religions, they actually serve the different purpose of authorising a new, equally particular conception of what Christianity, or Islam, or religion in general, *is* in essence. While the question of what is generally shared is open to discussion, along with the answers proposed, the deeper axioms by which it becomes legitimate and desirable to ground intra-Christian or intra-faith relations on a common core is excluded from discussion. Thus any criticism of the content of the common ground will leave untouched the basic structure of the discourse, which pushes towards the establishment of a set of minimal essentials as a discourse regulating and relativising all other accounts of truth.

¹⁵⁰ Rowan Williams, 'Theological Integrity', *New Blackfriars* vol. 72, no. 847 (1991).

Grotius recognised doctrinal and ethical dimensions of religion, and he sought to provide an account of Christianity that would include only doctrines and ethical precepts that were already shared by all Christians. Yet the success of Grotius' strategy was dependent on placing a number of issues outside of the discussion – issues about which there was no particular consensus existing. For example, Grotius' interpretation of religious disagreement in the Low Countries, from which his solution followed, depended on a specific theological evaluation of what was at stake that was neither neutral nor universally shared. He began from the assumption that true Christianity was characterised by peace and harmony among Christians, rather than doctrinal orthodoxy and uniformity. The greatest threat to true Christianity was the conflict itself, and not one or other of the parties in it. This led him to a particular construction of the meaning of the religious disagreements, namely that they were quarrels over indifferent matters, and a particular solution – the reduction of Christianity to articles of faith common to all, and toleration in all else.

This strategy could not itself be validated according to the ideal of consensus, for many of his contemporaries would have regarded such an attitude as false compromise, insisting instead that reunion could and should only come about through universal conversion to one or other version of orthodoxy. Grotius' friend Antonius Walaeus, for example, dissented from Grotius' suggestion that confessional differences were insignificant. He regarded certain papist teachings, such as the emphasis on works and the intercession of the saints, as a direct threat to the 'stronghold of the true faith'.¹⁵¹ Placing a greater emphasis on defending a bastion of Calvinist orthodoxy than peace and unity in Christendom scuppers the entire strategy, for it would mean placing more emphasis on what divided Christians than Grotius was willing to do. Yet the judgement that confessional differences were insignificant was a judgement that could not itself be validated by the criterion of consensus.

Already in his characterisation of the problem then, Grotius had to deviate from his desire to focus on what people had in common. Just as there was no neutral perspective on how to describe the problem, there could be no neutral perspective on what course of action was natural and necessary. This becomes clear when we note that acceptance of Grotius' solution required assent to his proposal to separate theory and practice, and his demand to reduce the former to what is required by the latter. The proposal that ethics is the principal part of religion is supported in Grotius' argument by

¹⁵¹ Grotius, *Meletius*, pp. 51-53.

the observation that ethical issues are almost never as controversial as doctrinal questions, but it does not necessarily follow from this that ethics is at the heart of religion. This move depends on the prior assumption that the most valuable things in religion are those that are most widely recognised among Christians, or a preference for a simpler, humanist religion of moral truth. The definition of religion in terms of ethics was manifestly not shared by many of his fellow Protestants. The subordination of doctrine went against the dominant trend in seventeenth century Protestant theology, which was overwhelmingly headed in the direction of reducing the Christian faith to a set of propositions.¹⁵² Grotius was clearly aware of this, as is demonstrated by his lamentations over the false priority that was being given to doctrinal issues, but he did not seem to recognise the problem it caused for his strategy of consensus.

The question of whether and how Christians or people of other faiths ought to reconcile their differences is ultimately a theological question that cannot be evaded by the common ground proposal. This itself involves contentious judgements about what authorises true Christian belief – Grotius introduced certain standards such as peace and actually existing consensus which must be placed outside of the discussion if the common ground is to function. The representation of Christian truth as manifested primarily through peace and unity rather than doctrinal orthodoxy and the redefinition of religion as ethics were contentious proposals that could not be justified solely through appeal to the idea of consensus, but were assumptions that required a kind of conversion for the common ground to operate. Grotius did not evade the difficult problem of conflicting versions of the true faith, for he enclosed his version of what was common within a set of founding assumptions that were themselves controversial and contestable. He replaced the problem of how to mediate between people who disagree over the issue of the freedom of the will in the reception of divine grace with the problem of how to negotiate competing conceptions of what religion is fundamentally about – consensus or purity, belief or duty.

Who is included?

In chapter 3, it was argued that there could not be a neutral definition of religion because any such definition would always involve judgements about who or what should be included in the category that were themselves dependent on prior assumptions about

¹⁵² Harrison, *"Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*, pp. 19-25.

what counts as religion. Similarly, even if one accepts that Christians should simply unite around what they have in common, there will still be important and contentious commitments that govern the conclusions that can be reached through any particular application of the common ground strategy that cannot be justified within the terms of the common ground framework itself. The question that must be asked regarding any such project is who is included among the ranks of 'Christians'? Grotius clearly believed that the anti-Trinitarian beliefs of the Socinians – followers of the first Unitarian, Fausto Sozino – put them outside the pale.¹⁵³ However, this judgement can obviously not be justified solely on the basis of an argument about what all Christians believe, for in order to provide an account of what all Christians believe, one must have a prior notion of who counts as a Christian, which is of course the very thing at issue. The denotation of Christianity cannot be entirely prior to its connotation, and so there is clearly another criterion at work that cannot be justified solely within the terms of the common ground.

It is still worth making this point in the twenty-first century, for in an era in which historical faith traditions are under scrutiny for their truth and social value, accounts of the true identity or nature of particular faiths are frequently justified by reference to what its adherents are said to believe. If one takes self-identification as the measure, the search for a set of shared beliefs may not yield anything useful, for what is actually believed has broadened in the intervening centuries and there is now a considerable pluralism in belief amongst those who identify themselves with major traditions. In Britain, any attempt to define the essentials of Christianity on the basis of what all Christians believe would encounter this problem in a more acute form. The phenomenon of 'believing without belonging' noted by Grace Davie, in which consistently high percentages of the population continue to identify themselves as Christians whilst only a small minority retains any regular institutional connection with a church, has produced a situation in which there is significantly greater variety in what passes for Christian belief than in the seventeenth century.¹⁵⁴ It is reasonable to assume that a similar dynamic is at work in other traditions under the individualising pressure of liberal culture, and in this context the search for beliefs or principles shared by all who consider themselves part of that tradition is not likely to deliver any very precise results. It is perhaps partly for this reason that it is more common to follow Grotius in adopting a more restrictive understanding of who should be included. The claim to knowledge of what is shared by all Christians, all Muslims, or all Stalinists even, generally involves an

¹⁵³ Grotius, *Meletius*, p. 52.

¹⁵⁴ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

implicit claim as to who is a genuine Christian, Muslim, or Stalinist. Beyond the confines of those who understand themselves as sharing a common tradition, shared features of 'religion' can never simply be endorsed by identifying what is common to those who are religious without implicitly assuming some prior standards as to who and what should be included in the category.

The homogenising tendency

A further issue is that the common ground is more than simply a basis for co-existence among diverse faith groups. If the common ground is to function as a basis for peaceful co-existence, one must emphasise the importance of what is shared relative to what divides. This imperative itself exercises a discursive 'drag' towards homogenisation. The ultimate effect of which will be to reduce differences to nominal superficialities of no practical import. Grotius himself apparently recognised this, approvingly noting in a letter to Walaeus the effect this would have on Roman Catholicism, not only with regard to its social power, but even its ultimate persistence: 'It follows that if Religion is reduced to what all Christian churches have at all times believed in, then Papism collapses, for it is made up of isolated opinions'.¹⁵⁵ As Tuck points out, this is what would happen to any confession that insisted on doctrines and practices that went beyond the minimalist Christianity of Grotius – Calvinism included, with its predestinarianism.¹⁵⁶

Preventing critique

Thus the common ground functions as a critical standard against which all positive historical religions are measured, in the name of peace and security. From a different angle though, the common ground can be seen as profoundly conservative, for it has no means of criticising those features of traditions that may be dangerous or undesirable even as they may, in a particular historical period, happen to be generally uncontroversial. For this reason it is far from clear that truth can be entirely equated with consensus, or wholly abandoned in its pursuit. This is John Milbank's criticism of common ground approaches: to the extent that their overriding concern is the development of mutual respect between different churches, they fail to be sufficiently critical of whatever

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in Shah, 'Making the Christian World Safe for Liberalism: From Grotius to Rawls', p. 129; Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, pp. 186-187.

¹⁵⁶ Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, p. 187.

genuine points of contact they might find. In other words, the lowest common denominator approach works within the received variants of the faith, leaving those variants largely unquestioned. The example Milbank supplies is particularly relevant to consideration of Grotius' approach. He argues that the Reformation and Counter-Reformation Christianities were both deviations from earlier, more fruitful versions of the faith. From Milbank's perspective, certain common intellectual assumptions shared by these traditions – such as the dichotomy of nature and grace, and of reason and revelation – are themselves problematic and hence the truth does not lie somewhere in between actually existing standpoints, but in a critique of them.¹⁵⁷ This is precisely what the common ground approach is unable to accommodate though, for when present consensus is the only valid standard of socially acceptable truth, such critique is ruled out from the beginning as a divisive insistence on indifferent matters.

This is not simply a purchase of peace at the expense of truth though, for it may not even have the effect of securing harmony. It may be that conflict and division is itself the product of certain assumptions shared by competing confessions, and thus the endorsement of commonalities simply on the grounds of their uncontested character at a particular time may only perpetuate the discursive conditions of a violence that perpetually threatens recurrence. Milbank argues that the Reformation was itself the upshot of certain changes in late medieval theology that subsequently formed the largely-unquestioned backdrop to theological disputes of the period that followed. If this is the case, then Christian division may not have been generated and sustained by what was immediately controversial, but, paradoxically, by what was held in common.¹⁵⁸ While this is an example specific to Christianity, the point must hold more generally: simply focusing on what is shared will not address the discursive conditions at the root of the conflict if what is held in common is itself problematic. The key to peace in such a context would also be a more thorough critique of existing standpoints rather than an attempt to mediate between them.

New modes of division

A significant feature of the common ground is the claim to overcome violence through dispensing with or relativising the divisive elements within religious traditions. Yet there is always a moment of 'conversion' required, and a 'proselytising' effort to persuade

¹⁵⁷ Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, pp. 110-113.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.

others that this is the best way to secure peace. If there were not some who remained to be convinced of the common ground and the specific religious dispositions it requires, there would be no need for it in the first place. There is no guarantee, though, that this missionary process will be as peaceful and tolerant as the end point that is advocated, especially if those who refuse to reconcile themselves to the common ground are represented for that reason as the enemies of peace. For example, in the Grotian paradigm, the implicit argument is that non-Christian religions and those forms of the Christian faith that insist on more than a simple ethical consensus are actually incompatible with social peace. This belief can serve as a justification for more active efforts to obstruct, undermine, work against or convert those who remain wedded to them. This can be seen in Grotius' own attitude towards those he regarded as true to the letter of Calvinism, which, he believed, encouraged subversion of the constitution and implacable opposition to liberty of conscience. The project of pacifying society involved, for this reason, the elimination of particular confessions incompatible with the proposed 'consensus': 'Those who seek to further peace among Christians are obliged to destroy those dogmas that disturb political peace'.¹⁵⁹

This is more of a problem when exclusive truth claims are themselves represented as the cause of conflict. Herbert argued that insisting on the particular doctrines and rituals of a specific tradition will lead to violence, he did not think that insisting on a more inclusive mode of religion against exclusive modes was dangerous in the same way. The same assumption can be found in contemporary arguments about religion and violence – for example Charles Kimball's condemnation of exclusivism discussed above, and Oliver McTernan's argument on similar lines that was discussed in chapter 3.¹⁶⁰ While these authors condemn drawing lines *between* traditions as divisive, intolerant and dangerous, they have no such qualms about drawing lines *within* traditions between those who recognise that their beliefs and practices, like those of other religions, are merely secondary metaphors gesturing towards the same divine realm, and those who do not. If this involves, as has been argued, advocating equally particular versions of the various faith traditions, there is no reason to suppose that arguing for normative modes of being Christian, Muslim, or Hindu, avoids the problems involved in advocating one of

¹⁵⁹ Grotius, quoted in Shah, 'Making the Christian World Safe for Liberalism: From Grotius to Rawls', p. 130.

¹⁶⁰ Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, p. 32; McTernan, *Violence in God's Name: Religion in an Age of Conflict*, pp. 162-163.

these traditions as better and more true than the others. They are equally open to their own charge of endorsing dangerously exclusive truth claims.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to examine the role of security discourses in the imagination of religion as a genus. The debates discussed may seem obscure, but in the light of the concern in this thesis to understand the contribution of liberal security thinking to the production of specific discourses of religion, their discussion serves two main purposes. Firstly, they illustrate the argument that security thinking has historically provided a powerful impetus for the articulation of specific discourses of religion. Secondly, they illustrate the contours and the limitations of an important part of the discursive inheritance that informs contemporary liberal approaches to religious violence. Examining the contingent emergence of the notion of religion as a genus not only sheds important light on the historical reasons for the incoherence of the conventional imagination of religion as a genus, it opens up the possibility of thinking about alternatives, and illuminates what is at stake in the contemporary pursuit of a common ground.

It has been argued that the peculiarities of religion as a incoherent category can be explained by its imbrication in the politics of confessional violence in the seventeenth century. The concept was a side-effect of an ecumenical search for common essentials shared by 'the religions' that would command universal assent from the warring parties. Grotius sought agreement in this way among Christians, while Herbert of Cherbury extended the paradigm to encompass all known religions on the basis of a confidence in God's benevolent dispensation and an optimistic reading of what information was available about the non-Christian traditions of the world. The consequence was the mistaken argument that there were a set of beliefs and ethical principles common to all the religions. It was an argument of philosophical theology that aimed to shape religious belief and practice in a particular direction, but it was one that had a more lasting impact in the idea of religion as a genus, which can be understood as a conceptual residue of Herbert's common ground strategy.

It was noted that poor sources probably contributed to the confusion, but also that the idea of a common core shared by the religions served the purposes of those concerned about religious violence. The lack of accurate sources may even have helped

here, for Herbert's speculations could not be decisively refuted. The prevailing conception of peace as the civic peace of the state was influential in two respects. Its achievement was a major objective of those doing the defining. It also made the common ground strategy viable in some respects, for it was only once the state had assumed responsibility for the pacification of society that a minimal conception of religion could be countenanced. Once peace was conceived as secured through obedience to the law, peacemaking was no longer dependent on the sacraments of the Church and the social rituals that accompanied them, and the role of faith was simply to inculcate obedient, law-abiding or ethical dispositions. And in this respect, the minimal religion of Grotius and Herbert, commending belief in a benevolent but just God and a set of basic ethical injunctions, was perfectly suited to the maintenance of security in a state that assumed no overarching conception of the good.

If the specific formulations of Herbert and Grotius have had their day, aspects of their approaches have resurfaced in more recent common ground strategies. One has recommended that the religions abandon their claims to comprehend reality better than other traditions, for the sake of avoiding the violence and intolerance that is said to have resulted from such a stance historically. The second has advocated building solidarity among the religions on the basis of shared ethical concerns, whilst agreeing to disagree on controversial doctrinal matters. A number of criticisms have been offered concerning the common ground approach: the common ground approach itself, as well as all accounts of what is shared, simply represent new particular perspectives rather than being impartial; they displace conflict rather than solving it; they devalue the unique, tradition-specific aspects of the religions in comparison to the minimal common core; and they cannot be sufficiently critical of extant religious traditions. Finally, to the extent that the content privileged and united around has little confessional particularity or tradition-specific meaning, it will tend to be supplied by the prevailing political-economic discourses of liberalism and capitalism, neutralising religious traditions as sources of critical social alternatives to the existing order.

This chapter built on the argument of chapter 3, that the idea of religion as a genus (Selden's 'doublet-and-trimmings' theory) was ultimately unsustainable when maintained alongside the claim that it was also a discrete domain of life. It has accounted for the emergence of this idea through the security politics of an age of confessional strife, and suggested that the common ground strategy shares many of the weaknesses of attempts to conceptualise religion as a genus. It also located this emergence against the

background of the new state-centred security paradigm described in the last chapter, suggesting that the religious norm prescribed by the common ground owed much to prevailing seventeenth century ideas about how religion contributed to the stability and peace of the state. While this chapter and the previous one have treated secularisation and the common ground as separate security strategies, they are mutually reinforcing in practice. Differentiation tends to confine religion to a set of speculative doctrines or general ethical impulses as more and more aspects of life are governed by secular rationalities. At the same time, the tendency of common ground strategies to define the essence of religion in minimalist, abstract or highly generalised ways devalues the particularities of the religious traditions and denies a final validity to their truth claims. The consequence here is that they have nothing to offer to the political and economic realms, beyond providing individuals with a source of vague ethical inspiration. The final chapter takes up Tony Blair's response to the threat of terrorism associated with Islam, arguing that he ended up in exactly this place.

6 SECURITY AND LIBERAL GOVERNMENT: MODERATE RELIGION VERSUS EXTREMISM IN TONY BLAIR'S RESPONSE TO 'ISLAMIC TERRORISM', 1997-2007

It was argued in Part I that important dimensions of the politics *about* religion are centred on two different ways of conceptualising phenomenon – as a genus and as a specific domain of human activity. Chapters 4 and 5 examined two different liberal strategies for the pacification of religiously divided societies, focusing on their constitutive role in the production of these two conceptions of religion. This chapter examines in detail the constitution of religion within a contemporary liberal response to violence associated with religion: the response of Tony Blair during his time as British Prime Minister to the problem of 'Islamic terrorism'.

The analysis in this chapter is offered as an *illustration* of the contemporary role of liberal security discourse in authorising particular conceptions of religion. It does not aspire to be a comprehensive *case study* of British responses to terrorism. The aim is rather to examine the construction of religion through its articulation in connection with violence and insecurity by one very significant individual. The chapter focuses on Blair's time as British Prime Minister, although reference has been made in places to his subsequent career where this illustrates continuous themes in his thought. The chapter uses material drawn from speeches and public statements, as the aim is to examine how Blair's *representation* of religion feeds into broader discursive struggles over the meaning, character and purpose of religion. It is no part of this chapter to psychologise the former Prime Minister or attempt to divine what he 'really' thought or believed.

While this is not a case study, it is a fascinating illustration deserving of more study. Blair could not avoid involvement in the politics *about* religion here, and his response is interesting not least in the light of his personal reluctance to discuss his faith while in power, together with some ambiguous statements on the relationship between religion and politics. The chapter argues that in his approach to the problem of 'Islamic terrorism', he reiterated the liberal separation of spheres, and contributed to the reproduction of problematic assumptions about religion as a genus. Both the common ground strategy and the privileging of secular norms of security are evident in his

statements on the matter, and he provides a clear illustration of the point made at the end of the previous chapter: that the search for a common ground is implicated in a secularising movement towards more abstract and minimal religion. This minimal religion was then held up as a normative yardstick against which all particular expressions of religion were categorised as moderate or extremist, providing a basis for intervention to empower what was taken to be the authentic voice of Islam.

The chapter proceeds in three stages. The first section begins with a brief summary of the previous chapters as the context for an account of how Blair understood the character of religion and its rightful place in politics. The second section examines how this discourse of religion informed his interpretation of the role of Islam in political violence, and the solutions he advocated. The third section discusses the theory of security that informed Blair's representation of extremism as a threat.

6.1 Not Doing God...But Talking About Religion

The thesis has argued up to this point that a significant dimension of contemporary controversy over religion and its place in the modern world revolves around security questions. It has also proposed that the politics *about* religion goes right down to the very constitution of the concept itself within discourse – all of those ways of speaking and writing about religion, and acting on it, that assume it to be a certain sort of thing. The politics *about* religion is a struggle over the meaning of the concept, as well as being fought out through the deployment of competing versions of the concept itself. To some extent this situation is registered in controversies over the connotations the term carries, which govern attitudes towards religious people and the social esteem accorded to religious commitment and activity. Politics about religion also involves implicit or explicit decisions about the denotation and definition of the concept. The second and third chapters identified two fundamental dimensions of the conceptualisation of religion in modernity that are either directly contested (the differentiation of religion as a life sphere) or are likely to generate controversy when they are assumed in definitions of religion (religion conceived as a genus). Accounts of the relationship between religion and violence cannot avoid invoking and therefore perpetuating particular discourses of religion in their usage of the concept. The essentially contested nature of religion as a category will mean that these accounts of the religion-security nexus are also always controversial. However, the problematic notion of religion as a genus means that

accounts based on the conventional concept of religion as designating five or six ‘world religions’ are unlikely to be very illuminating.

The fourth and fifth chapters continued these themes, focusing on solutions to religious violence as interventions in the politics *about* religion. They explored the hypothesis that security discourses, and those associated with liberalism in particular, have historically been a major site for the production of religion as a concept. These chapters identified two strategies for the pacification of early modern societies that assumed discourses of security associated with liberalism, and coincided with changes in the meaning of the concept of religion. The argument here has been that political and theological responses to the problem of religious violence commend or demand that religious belief and practice should assume a certain form if it is to be tolerated, and are themselves in this way partly constitutive of the forms taken by religious traditions. This feeds into the conceptualisation of religion, which itself shapes later interpretations and responses to conflict. Concepts of religion shaped by earlier security strategies provide discursive frames that, when used to view a particular conflict, make it reasonable to argue over whether the dispute is ‘religious or political’, shape opinions about its tractable or intractable nature, and make certain solutions seem natural and legitimate (‘keep religion and politics in their proper domains’ or ‘bring religious leaders together to discuss what they share in common’).

This final chapter begins with the observation that Tony Blair was inescapably involved in the politics *about* religion during his time as British Prime Minister. This is not, one might suggest, primarily due to his own faith commitments, but because in the wake of 11 September 2001 and the London bombings of 7 July 2005, he was compelled to provide an account of how the British Government conceived the role of Islam in those events. This chapter argues that his interpretation of the situation was shaped by assumptions about religion indebted to both the ethical common ground and the differentiation strategies. His solutions to religious violence consequently employed a measure of both as well – shared values were emphasised, and forms of religion incompatible with the liberal practices of government through which security is ensured were delegitimised as extremism.

When is ‘doing God’ not ‘doing God’?

Blair is a particularly interesting example of the politics *about* religion, because he illustrates the impossibility of making neutral statements about religion that do not trespass on the debates through which members of particular traditions negotiate the meaning and purpose of their beliefs and practices. His own Christian faith has been well documented and its influence on his political convictions has generated considerable discussion and controversy.¹ Christianity is undoubtedly an important part of his life, from his 'religious awakening' at Oxford that has been described as 'the defining moment of his life',² through his membership of the Christian Socialist Movement, to his conversion to Catholicism and establishment of The Tony Blair Faith Foundation after leaving office.

Before he became Prime Minister, and after he left office, he wrote and spoke of the importance of faith to his politics. Before he became leader of the Labour Party he argued for the need to 're-unite the ethical code of Christianity with the basic values of democratic socialism'.³ In the years since he stepped down as Prime Minister he has spoken regularly on the subject, claiming that his Christian faith has always been central to his politics.⁴ 'One of the oddest questions I get asked in interviews', he has said, 'is: is faith important to your politics? It's like asking someone whether their health is important to them or their family. If you are someone "of faith" it is the focal point of belief in your life. There is no conceivable way that it wouldn't affect your politics'.⁵ He has argued that we should recognise the roles 'the great faiths' play, and their potential to 'humanise a globalising world'.⁶ He has established a foundation 'with the aim of

¹ e.g. John Burton and Eileen McCabe, *We Don't do God: Blair's Religious Belief and its Consequences* (London: Continuum, 2009); Anthony Seldon, *Blair*, 2nd ed (London: The Free Press, 2005), pp. 32-33, 515-531. For a sample of press conjecture see Kamal Ahmed, 'And on the Seventh Day Tony Blair Created...' *Observer*, 3 August 2003; Ruth Gledhill, 'Have Faith in Blair, Urges Anglican Ally', *Times*, 3 May 1997; Peter Osborne, 'The Special Relationship between Blair and God', *The Spectator*, 5 April 2003; John Rentoul, 'PM's Religion is a Key Force in his Life', *Independent*, 4 March 2006; John Rentoul, 'The Mystery of Blair the Convert', *Independent*, 23 December 2007; Rachel Sylvester, 'Mr Blair Has a Strong Belief in Mixing Religion and Politics', *Telegraph*, 27 December 2004; Martin Wroe, 'The Turbulent High Priest Who Has Blair's Ear', *Sunday Times*, 20 May 2007; Hugo Young, 'While Blair Seeks the Truth, Hague Searches for Votes', *Guardian*, 29 June 2000.

² Comment by Matthew D'Ancona, quoted in Seldon, *Blair*, p. 34.

³ Tony Blair, 'Foreword', in Christopher Bryant (ed.), *Reclaiming the Ground: Christianity and Socialism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993).

⁴ For example, see Tony Blair, 'Faith and Globalisation: Speech delivered at Westminster Cathedral, London, 3 April 2008', <http://tonyblairoffice.org/2008/04/speech-on-faith-globalisation.html>; Tony Blair, 'Speech to the National Prayer Breakfast, Washington D.C., 5 February 2009', <http://www.tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/2009/02/tony-blair-speech-to-the-natio.html>, accessed 23 March 2009. Also Murad Ahmed and Daniel Finkelstein, 'Tony Blair Didn't Do God in Downing Street. Now He's Making Up for Lost Time', *Times* 2008; Michael Elliott, 'Tony Blair's Leap of Faith', *Time*, 28 May 2008; Paul Richardson, 'Interview with Tony Blair', *Religious Intelligence*, <http://www.religiousintelligence.co.uk/news/?NewsID=4066>, accessed 14 March 2009.

⁵ Blair, 'Faith and Globalisation: Speech delivered at Westminster Cathedral, London, 3 April 2008'.

⁶ The quotations are from Tony Blair, 'Why We Must All Do God', *New Statesman*, 19 March 2009.

promoting greater respect and understanding between the major religions, to make the case for religion as a force for good, and to show this in action by encouraging interfaith initiatives to tackle global poverty and conflict'.⁷

During his time as Prime Minister, opinions differed over the whether Blair's faith had any significant impact on his decisions, even among those who worked with him. Some insisted that his policies were influenced entirely by his Christianity while others believed that he acted for other reasons but rationalised his decisions to himself in terms of faith.⁸ This chapter does not seek to judge whether Blair's actions or motivations really were Christian or not, but simply to examine the assumptions about 'religion' made in his public speeches and statements.

This is not to say that Blair's self-understanding as a Christian (to which there is ample testament) is not of interest here. One way in which it was interesting was the fact that he was reluctant to discuss it – or was persuaded not to – while he was Prime Minister. Since leaving office, he has offered a reason for this. Press Secretary Alastair Campbell's famous comment that 'We don't do God' has been explained by Blair as grounded in caution about the connotations carried by religion in British society.⁹ 'In our culture, here in Britain and in many other parts of Europe, to admit to having faith leads to a whole series of suppositions, none of which are very helpful to the practising politician'.¹⁰ Always conscious about image and the possibility that his words could be used against him, Blair and his advisors were anxious to escape the associations of religion with weirdness, messianism, holier-than-thou attitudes, supernatural enthusiasm, divisiveness, irrationality, and attempts to bestow divine legitimacy on politics.¹¹ On this account, Blair was constrained in his talk about religion by the meanings that were likely to be mobilised by language construed as religious. Sensitive to the connotations of 'religion', it seemed pragmatic to refrain from speaking about it too much.

On other occasions he has made more principled statements on keeping religion and politics in their rightful place. In 2005, he commented that 'Politics and religion – it is not that they do not have a lot in common, but if it ends up being used in the political

⁷ Ibid; Tony Blair Faith Foundation, 'Mission Statement', <http://www.tonyblairfaithfoundation.org/about-us/mission-statement.html>, accessed 1 May 2009.

⁸ The former was Graham Dale, former director of the Christian Socialist Movement whereas the latter was 'a key aide'. Both are quoted in Seldon, *Blair*, p. 528. It is interesting to note here that these different assessments echo the positions in broader debates about the role of religion in conflict discussed in chapter 1.

⁹ Colin Brown, 'Campbell interrupted Blair as he spoke of his faith: "We don't do God"', *Telegraph*, 3 May 2003; Peter Stothard, 'Behind the Scenes Portrait of Tony Blair at War', *Times*, 3 May 2003.

¹⁰ Blair, 'Faith and Globalisation: Speech delivered at Westminster Cathedral, London, 3 April 2008'.

¹¹ Ibid; Blair, 'Why We Must All Do God'. See similar comments in Richardson, 'Interview with Tony Blair'.

process, I think that is a bit unhealthy'.¹² But the distinction between religion and politics in Blair's statements is not so straightforward. How does he reconcile this desire to keep religion out of the political process with the insistence that there is no conceivable way in which a person's faith could not affect their politics? Consider also this recent statement, in which he has also referred to the rightness of a secularised differentiation of spheres:

I believe restoring religious faith to its rightful place, as the guide to our world and its future, is itself of the essence. The 21st Century will be poorer in spirit, meaner in ambition, less disciplined in conscience, if it is not under the guardianship of faith in God. I do not mean by this to blur the correct distinction between the realms of religious and political authority.¹³

This speech was made after Blair left office, but it is exemplary of an interesting ambiguity that runs through all his discussions about religion. At first sight, it is difficult to see how Blair can simultaneously maintain that religious faith should be a guide to the world and its future, whilst excluding the political realm from its authority. Furthermore, one can note that not all talk about religion was considered out of bounds. Blair was reluctant to make any statements that related to his own personal views on religion, or statements that would imply he wanted to impose his beliefs on others.¹⁴ He also, however, spent a lot of time while he was Prime Minister describing the true nature of Islam, commending particular types of religion and condemning others. Indeed, as will be observed below, the British Government made active efforts to encourage moderate Islam.

One should not rule out the possibility that his thinking was vague, confused and inconsistent on this matter. A recent admission by Blair about his approach to religion and politics during his premiership is revealing here. During a seminar on his Faith and Globalisation course at Yale University, he commented that 'I kind of think I got my life the wrong way round, because I should have started with the conceptual debate first, and then got on to the practice, but actually, I took all those decisions!'¹⁵

It would be a mistake to suppose that there was no consistency in these statements though. It is certainly true that the *ad hoc* character of Blair's approach to the

¹² Quoted in Stephen Bates, 'Keep Faith out of Politics, says Blair', *Guardian*, 23 March 2005. It is perhaps significant that this was an off-the-cuff comment made against the background of an abortion debate in which religious leaders were putting pressure on the Government.

¹³ Blair, 'Speech to the National Prayer Breakfast, Washington D.C., 5 February 2009'.

¹⁴ Blair, 'Faith and Globalisation: Speech delivered at Westminster Cathedral, London, 3 April 2008'.

¹⁵ 'Blair's Faith Foundation', *BBC Radio 4*, broadcast 14 April 2009.

issue of religion and violence in a globalising world makes it difficult to abstract a rationality underlying his statements on the issue. Any attempt to do so is to some degree artificial and it would be misleading to say that Blair had a 'theory of religion and violence'. But there was a rationality in his statements – a particular way of thinking about the relation between religion and politics, and it expresses many of the approaches to religion that have been described in previous chapters. The fact that it was expressed prior to serious conceptual reflection is a testament to the subtle force of these discourses.

The authentic voices of religion

It can be assumed that while Blair, like others, may not always be coherent in his thinking, he does strive towards that goal. The apparent tension in his thinking was reconciled through his conception of religion. He treated religion as a genus, and certain values and ethical commitments as the essential core of all religions despite their doctrinal differences. This was a clear reiteration of the more recent 'ethical common ground' strategies discussed in the last chapter, in which praxis is affirmed as a viable common ground even as the doctrinal diversity of the major religions is recognised.

Religion was cohesive rather than divisive. It emphasised the principles and fostered the dispositions necessary for social integration: 'Our major faith traditions – all of them more historic and deeply rooted than any political party or ideology – play a fundamental role in supporting and propagating values which bind us together as a nation'.¹⁶ Themes of community and equality figure prominently, and are represented as being common to all religions. Blair is reported to have been influenced by Hans Küng, who was noted in the previous chapter as an advocate of the ethical common ground.¹⁷ In 2000, he delivered a speech at Küng's Global Ethic Foundation in Tübingen – a speech he apparently spent a great deal of time preparing.¹⁸ He argued in the address that 'in a world of change, it is the belief in community, and in the equal worth of all, that offers us the only hope of a peaceful and prosperous future; and that a purely self-interested and materialistic philosophy will lead to ruin'.¹⁹ Religious faith was represented

¹⁶ Tony Blair, 'PM's Speech to the Christian Socialist Movement at Westminster Central Hall, 29 March 2001.' accessed 9 May 2007.

¹⁷ Wroe, 'The Turbulent High Priest Who Has Blair's Ear'.

¹⁸ Seldon, *Blair*, p. 525.

¹⁹ Tony Blair, 'Prime Minister's Speech to the Global Ethics Foundation, Tübingen University, Germany, 30 June 2000.' <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page1529.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

as playing a key role in the realisation of a more 'peaceful, secure and prosperous world', because it is in the world religions that the necessary values are traditionally found and most deeply rooted. These values are commitments to 'solidarity, justice, peace and the dignity of the human person'.²⁰ On this basis, Blair suggests that 'a society where there is religious faith will always, in my view, be inherently more likely finally to pursue the good of humankind'.²¹

Blair did not single out Christianity as embodying the values he was affirming, but spoke of religious faith in general, implying that they were features common to all religions. 'Indeed', he suggested on another occasion, 'what better start could there be to the new Millennium, marking the most important event of one religious faith, than if religions like nations started to reach out across traditional boundaries and achieve greater understanding of each other and what they share in common values?'²² The biggest obstacle to peace among religions was ignorance: 'Peace and religion have not always been fellow travelers, it is true, but today with greater understanding between religions a more just and peaceful world is ever closer...Religious dialogue and understanding is essential to peace. Ignorance creates fear, which creates conflict'.²³

He did not represent these common values as interesting coincidences, but as 'the basic premises of our faiths'.²⁴ These principles are not only shared by all faiths, but are constitutive of their identity. This posits a religious landscape made up of a variety of faiths whose doctrinal plurality is underlain by a certain common basis, various expressions of underlying universals. The claim that all religions rest on certain 'basic premises' implies a certain essentialism, and through specifying what these premises are, he sets up a normative standard against which particular expressions of faith can be judged. This became even more clear in June 2007, when Blair addressed a conference on Islam:

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Tony Blair, 'Speech delivered at Trimdon Colliery Community Centre, Co. Durham', http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/582621.stm, accessed 13 July 2008. The values underlying Islam would be familiar to a Christian reader of the Koran: 'anybody who even reads part of the message of, of the, of the Koran will realise that Islam is a peaceful religion and that the values that underpin it are the values that we Christians would recognise very easily indeed'. Tony Blair, 'Prime Minister's Meeting with Leaders of the Muslim Communities in Britain, 27 September 2001.' <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page1605.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

²³ Blair, 'Prime Minister's Speech to the Global Ethics Foundation, Tübingen University, Germany, 30 June 2000.'

²⁴ Ibid.

The principal purpose of this conference therefore is to let the authentic voices of Islam, in their various schools and manifestations, speak for themselves....In doing this, there is yet another purpose: to reclaim from extremists, of whatever faith, the true essence of religious belief. In the face of so much high profile accorded to religious extremism, to schism, and to confrontation, it is important to show that religious faith is not inconsistent with reason, or progress, or the celebration of diversity. Round the world today, along with the images of violence, are the patient good works of people of different faiths coming together, understanding each other, respecting each other.²⁵

Just as the values Blair mentioned – solidarity, justice, peace, and the dignity of the human person – are not exclusive to religion, it is clear that these attitudes and modes of behaviour are not, of themselves, distinctively religious either.

This, however, is precisely the point: they not the exclusive preserve of one religious tradition, or even religion in general, but are universal values. This is the paradox of Blair's discourse on religion: the values that he sees as most important in particular religious traditions – the values that are common to all religions – are represented as more fundamental than religion, and are not actually uniquely religious. Just as soon as the essence of religion has been identified, it vanishes again, as religion turns out to be something else. The explanation for this is again found in Blair's speech in Tübingen. Although the values necessary for the formation and maintenance of community have traditionally found their expression through religion, they do not derive from religion but are grounded in something in the human person:

Traditionally, these were religious values. But we now know, through several quite different disciplines, that they are universal values. Economists call them "social capital". Evolutionary biologists call them "reciprocal Altruism". Political theorists call them communitarianism or civil society. Each of these phrases stands for what is really a quite simple idea that what gives us the power to survive in a rapidly changing environment are the habits of co-operation, the networks of support, our radius of trust. And we learn those habits in families, schools congregations and communities...Without them, society is too abstract to be real.²⁶

²⁵ Tony Blair, 'Speech to the "Islam and Muslims in the World Today" Conference, 4 June 2007.' http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/uk_politics/6719153.stm, accessed 4 July 2007.

²⁶ Blair, 'Prime Minister's Speech to the Global Ethics Foundation, Tübingen University, Germany, 30 June 2000.'

What is best about religion, expressed in the 'basic premises of our faiths', therefore turns out to be universal and common to all humanity. This goes some way to explaining why doctrinally diverse religions are underlain by a set of common concerns. These commonalities are not accidental or contingent, but exist because all religious traditions have intuited what economics, evolutionary biology and political theory have shown to be a fundamental human truth. Furthermore, because these values developed, emerged or evolved as a response to human needs, they will meet human needs wherever they are applied – in other words, they are guaranteed to 'work'. As Blair put it, 'it is also about trying to show that there is a value system that isn't related to any religion, or one religion, one civilisation, it is about these basic values of humanity that wherever they are implemented or tried you get greater security'.²⁷ The truth of religion lies not in its doctrinal claims, but in its contribution to security.

Thus when Blair spoke of the world being guided by faith, he meant that it needs something like 'religious social capital'. In one sense this undermined the differentiation of religion and politics, for core religious values turned out to be identical with those that made political and economic systems stable and prosperous. But this de-secularisation was made innocuous and non-divisive by the argument that religious values actually turned out to be universal human values, were shared by the religious and the non-religious alike, and were also those values required for liberal market states. While these values exist independently of religion, they nevertheless define its essence. Religion is only held to be properly understood insofar as it expresses them. They can be affirmed as universal because they reflect an aspect of our common humanity. The world religions have traditionally been carriers; nevertheless, their validation does not depend on particular theological justifications or definitions, and they are not the exclusive property of particular communities of faith. This normative conception of the formal characteristics of true religion is linked to a specific understanding of the proper role played by religion in society. Because true religion embodies a truth about human sociality, the role played by particular forms of religion in society is one indicator of whether they conform to the ideal. True religion is said to foster the dispositions and habits of co-operation necessary for the formation and maintenance of community, and the successful and peaceful operation of society.

²⁷ Tony Blair, 'Transcript of Press Conference given by the Prime Minister and the US President, Mr George Bush', <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page6032.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

One can also see from this how Blair can simultaneously affirm the importance of his faith for his politics, while maintaining that politics and religion have their proper realms. Instead of a totally sealing-off politics from religion, Blair leaves room for inspirational moral force of the most general kind. Yet there is a new kind of exclusion, based on his distinction between the shared core of values and the diverse doctrinal elements, which were symbolic articulations of the basic ethical commitments of the faiths.²⁸ Only these universal values shared by all faiths could be admitted to politics. The fact of disagreement among the faiths in matters of doctrine required greater mutual understanding of each other's traditions by religious believers through dialogue and interfaith encounter. This diversity might even be celebrated as a strength, but it should not be admitted to the political process itself. The consequence of this position is that religious engagement in politics is legitimate only to the extent that it seeks to realise universal values whose content and direction is stripped of any divisive confessional specificity. Theological politics serves a universal (liberal) social and economic project, against which tradition-specific conceptions of the good are contrasted as politically divisive.

On the basis of the discussion in the previous chapter, we can note several problems with Blair's common ground. Firstly, in an attempt to circumvent 'dogmatic' differences he falsely assumes ethics and tradition-based reasoning about the purpose and proper performance of ethical actions to be separable. Secondly, if the ethical aspects of traditions are inseparable from the doctrinal reasoning through which such practices are taught and passed on, then there will be implications of expecting that particular traditions to conform their ethical practice to whatever is considered to be a universal norm. Altering the habitual modes of social organisation and ethical action through which the discursive logic of different traditions is lived out will introduce tensions and disjunctures within those traditions between practice and belief, if not undermine them completely. While in some cases this may not be a bad thing (depending on one's perspective), it should not be supposed that this is necessarily a reform in accordance with the 'true nature' of the faith.

This leads to a third problem: the rhetoric of impartiality – Blair's claim to speak for the 'authentic voices' of all faiths – conceals the particularity of the perspective being proposed. Blair normalised a conception of religion which is deeply indebted to the modern liberal strand of Christianity. As Rowan Williams describes it, 'the liberal

²⁸ See Blair's very Protestant description of the Eucharist as a symbol. Blair, 'Foreword', p. 11. Since his Catholic conversion, he may now hold a different view.

Christian approach assumes that the business of Christian commitment is not to produce lives that participate in the holiness of Christ so much as lives that can be lived with a fairly easy conscience within the arrangements of the modern state, motivated by a rather unspecific inspiration'.²⁹ Finally, it was noted in the last chapter that the 'inclusive' common ground does not preclude boundary drawing and violence against those who do not share it. Indeed, it arguably undermines possible restraint, because the content is so thin and open to a variety of interpretations.

Blair's approach to religion and politics is a good illustration of how the common ground strategy merges with the differentiation of spheres. The previous chapter observed that defining the politically-relevant aspects of the religions as being those they share in common leads to a set of minimalist, abstract and very generalised values. To place greater emphasis on how particular traditions specify the content of concepts such as solidarity, peace and justice would be to undermine the common ground. Religion is therefore confined to a set of general ethical impulses with nothing specific to say about the political and economic realms, which are now governed according to their own autonomous rationalities.

Inhabiting the roles of Prime Minister and Christian believer, Blair was responding to what John Milbank has described as 'a perceived need to discover precisely how to fulfil Christian precepts about charity and freedom in contemporary society in an uncontroversial manner, involving cooperation with the majority of non-Christian fellow citizens'.³⁰ Milbank was describing twentieth-century Christian political theology, but it seems an apt summary of Blair's standpoint. Reducing religion to a set of universal values to be applied pragmatically through liberal government was a way of realising a Christian political vision in a world which either doesn't 'do God', or does different gods. If such a project is uncontroversial, this only reflects the extent to which various religious traditions in Britain have come to think of their ethical dimension as worked out through a commitment to liberal values, rather the fact that it expressed any genuinely neutral perspective.

The partiality of Blair's perspective is significant, because his analysis of the threat of terrorism associated with Islam rooted the problem directly in extremist forms of religion itself. In response, he commended the kind of religion described above – moderate religion – whose characteristics and mode of relating to politics were essentially

²⁹ Rowan Williams, 'Convictions, Loyalties and the Secular State', <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/1478>, accessed 15 March 2008.

³⁰ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 2.

shared by all faiths. This was more than an empirical contention regarding the role of religion, for it functioned as normative a criterion to distinguish between forms of religion that were tolerable and those that were not, if we were to enjoy security and prosperity in the twenty-first century. Security and prosperity, however, depended on the adoption of liberal modes of government. The next section will examine Blair's analysis of the causes of terrorism associated with Islam, and the prescriptions that followed.

6.2 Islam and Terrorism: Blair's Analysis and Prescription

There are three points to note about Blair's basic analysis of terrorism associated with Islam. The first that while he began by locating the root causes in social and economic dissatisfactions in other parts of the world, he moved towards a position in which the problem is represented as rooted entirely in a form of religion. The second is that the problem was not Islam, but 'extremist' or 'perverted' forms of Islam. Good and bad forms of Islam were classified in a binary of 'moderate' and 'extremist' religion. Islam was treated as a species of a common genus – moderate Islam shared all the good characteristics of moderate religion in other traditions, whereas extremism was a problem that afflicted all faiths. As was argued in chapter 1, how the problem is understood determines the kind of solutions that will be privileged. The third point to note is that the move towards a representation of violence as rooted in a distorted form of religion privileged a security strategy that attempted to reform or reshape religious belief and practice. It has been argued in the last two chapters that these security responses can contribute in powerful ways to the imagination of religion, and so Blair's analysis must be reckoned as a serious intervention in the politics *about* religion.

The causes of religious violence

It will be recalled from the discussion in chapter 1 that there has been debate between those who see violence as a problem of religion, and those for whom it is a symptom of some deeper problem (e.g. economic or political grievances, or pathological personalities) for which religion is merely an epiphenomenal expression. Blair moved from a material grievance explanation to a religion explanation, through an intermediate stage in which religious fanatics exploited the material grievances of those whose circumstances made them vulnerable to manipulation.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Blair analysed Osama bin Laden's motivation as the pursuit of power.

Usama bin Laden likes to pretend that he speaks for the Palestinian cause. He likes to pretend that he is driven by faith. Neither of these claims, it seems to me, are true. They are a cover for his real motivation, which is power; power that he wields through terror...Let nobody believe this is about religious faith, when in the pursuit of his goals he has been willing to murder innocent women and children, including Muslims.³¹

This article was produced for the Muslim media, and it was written during a phase of the response in which Blair was keen to make it clear that Islam was not being targeted.³² Yet this is not simply an effort to reassure Muslims. Note that Blair denied here this was about 'religious faith', and recall what Blair saw religious faith as being about: solidarity, justice, peace etc. The possibility of a religious cause was ruled out by Blair's particular vision of what religion was all about. This was consistent with the solution he put forward in his speech to the Labour party conference ten days earlier. He had made ambitious proposals for re-ordering the world, quelling the chaos 'elsewhere' in order that people 'here' can enjoy order and stability.³³ The solution he proposed – measures to alleviate social, economic and political instability in other parts of the world – were fundamentally consistent with this analysis of the conflict as being rooted in material grievances and political oppression rather than religion.

A few months later, the narrative shifted to one in which extremist religion exploits socio-economic grievances. He suggested that if we want to think about how the current situation can be resolved,

The starting point is to make a leap of imagination...to the streets of the Arab world where bright, angry, disaffected young men – by no means always from

³¹ Tony Blair, 'Article by the Prime Minister for the Muslim Media, 12 October 2001.' <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page1628.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

³² Also 'It was the work of terrorists, pure and simple. We must not honour them with any misguided religious justification...The perpetrators of those attacks in America contravened all the tenets of Islam'. Blair, 'Prime Minister's Meeting with Leaders of the Muslim Communities in Britain, 27 September 2001.' Numerous other instances could be referenced. See for example Tony Blair, 'Prime Minister's Statement to Parliament on the September 11 Attacks, 4 October 2001.' <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page1606.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007; Tony Blair, 'Prime Minister's Statement to the House of Commons following the September 11 Attacks, 14 September 2001.' <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page1598.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

³³ Tony Blair, 'Speech to the Labour Party Conference', *Guardian*, 2 October 2001.

poor families, but still with neither work nor prospects – seek outlets for their feelings of betrayal and frustration. They fall for dogmas that tell them to blame their troubles on a distant Satan, and give their lives meaning by committing themselves to relentless struggle.³⁴

Lack of economic and political opportunity created the conditions within which religious extremism became an attractive option, making some young Muslims susceptible to the propaganda of the fanatics. Whilst religious ‘dogmas’ were now seen as an important factor, they had not entirely replaced material motivations in the explanation of terrorism.

By 2006 though, Blair had reversed his position and was now denying the importance of poverty and social resentments entirely. Despite his earlier arguments about feelings of betrayal and frustration being behind terrorism, he now claimed that

it is almost incredible to me that so much of Western opinion appears to buy the idea that the emergence of this global terrorism is somehow our fault...it is also rubbish to suggest that it is the product of poverty. It is true that it will use the cause of poverty. But its fanatics are hardly the champions of economic development. It is based on religious extremism. That is the fact. And not any religious extremism; but a specifically Muslim version.³⁵

What had precipitated this change in Blair’s explanation? An important contributory factor is political expediency. This story of ‘poverty breeds extremism’ could not be sustained unchanged following the London bombings of 7 July 2005, when it emerged that the attackers were British and had not grown up in circumstances of unusual hardship.³⁶ The issue could not easily be represented in this way without characterising Britain as an economically backward country with a repressive government. While some of his critics would doubtless have regarded this as a reasonable description of the country, this was a discourse Blair was understandably reluctant to inhabit after eight years in power.

Predictably then, he began to place more emphasis on the idea that violence was rooted in a corrupt or perverted form of Islam. Islamic extremism was no longer

³⁴ Tony Blair, 'Speech by the Prime Minister at the Lord Mayor's Banquet, 12 November 2001.' <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page1661.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

³⁵ Tony Blair, 'Speech to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, 1 August 2006', <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page9948.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

³⁶ BBC News, 'Suicide Bombers 'Ordinary' Lives', <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4678837.stm>, accessed 5 July 2007.

conceived as exploiting existing dissatisfactions and using them for its own ends. It was now represented as warping its adherent's perceptions of events and actions, creating resentments where none previously existed. Mohammed Sadiq Khan, the ringleader of the 7/7 bombers had grown up 'free to practise his religion, free to speak out, free to vote, with a good standard of living and every chance to raise a family in a decent way of life'.³⁷ His grievances about the suppression of Muslims and the wickedness of Britain and the United States were rooted not in his experiences in Britain, but in a foreign ideology.³⁸

Religious extremism and fanaticism was represented as being, in its Islamic variant, a major threat to peace, security and prosperity. It was securitised, by which I mean naming an issue 'as posing an existential threat to some designated referent object'.³⁹ In this case, extremism was represented as threatening 'our way of life'.⁴⁰ The link between this threat and religion was represented by Blair as being more than superficial:

There are those - perfectly decent-minded people - who say the extremists who commit these acts of terrorism are not true Muslims. And, of course, they are right. They are no more proper Muslims than the Protestant bigot who murders a Catholic in Northern Ireland is a proper Christian. But, unfortunately, he is still a "Protestant" bigot. To say his religion is irrelevant is both completely to misunderstand his motive and to refuse to face up to the strain of extremism within his religion that has given rise to it.⁴¹

Perversions of true religion

This last quotation makes clear that violence was not rooted in a problem with Islam itself, though. Blair repeatedly contrasted 'true' or 'authentic' Islam with extremist misinterpretations, which were represented as distortions of an essentially peaceful

³⁷ Tony Blair, "'Clash about Civilisations" Speech, 21 March 2006.'
<http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page9224.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, p. 21. On securitisation see also Wæver, 'Securitisation and Desecuritisation'.

⁴⁰ For an interesting exploration of this discourse, see Richard Johnson, 'Defending Ways of Life: The (Anti-)Terrorism Rhetorics of Bush and Blair', *Theory, Culture and Society* vol. 19, no. 4 (2002).

⁴¹ Blair, "'Clash about Civilisations" Speech, 21 March 2006.'

tradition. 'Perversion of true Islam'⁴² became almost a stock phrase that appeared when Blair discussed this phenomenon. The version of Islam peddled by the Taliban and Osama bin Laden is condemned as being 'a million miles away from reality'⁴³ – it is an interpretation which 'distorted and dishonoured the message of one of the world's great religions and civilisations'.⁴⁴ He spoke of 'the authentic voices of Islam', suggesting that 'the voices of extremism are no more representative of Islam than the use, in times gone by, of torture to force conversion to Christianity, represents the true teaching of Christ'.⁴⁵

This theme – that extremism as a distortion of Islam comparable to historical misinterpretations of Christianity – was repeated by Blair on a number of other occasions. He declared that 'The true followers of Islam are our brothers and sisters in this struggle. Bin Laden is no more obedient to the proper teaching of the Koran than those Crusaders of the 12th century who pillaged and murdered, represented the teaching of the Gospel'.⁴⁶ Islamist extremism was represented as an instance of the more general phenomenon of 'religious extremism'.⁴⁷ As Blair puts it, 'it needs to be made clear again and again that our quarrel is not with Islam but with extremism and fanaticism, whether it be Christian, Jewish, Hindu or Islam'.⁴⁸ He reiterated this in a speech to the U.S. Congress in 2003, arguing that 'we are not fighting for Christianity but against religious fanaticism of all kinds'.⁴⁹ Religion was thus a genus.

Theological interventions: solutions to religious violence

The new explanation implied a different account of the relationship between religion and conflict. Religion could no longer be insulated as epiphenomenal, for certain manifestations of religion were now represented as directly responsible for the violence.

⁴² Tony Blair, 'Press Conference with Tony Blair and Afghan President Hamid Karzai, 19 July 2005.' <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page7955.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

⁴³ Tony Blair, 'Prime Minister Tony Blair's interview with Al-Jazeera, 9 October 2001.' <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page1624.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

⁴⁴ Blair, 'Speech by the Prime Minister at the Lord Mayor's Banquet, 12 November 2001.'

⁴⁵ Blair, 'Speech to the "Islam and Muslims in the World Today" Conference, 4 June 2007.'

⁴⁶ Blair, 'Speech to the Labour Party Conference'.

⁴⁷ Blair, '"Clash about Civilisations" Speech, 21 March 2006.'

⁴⁸ Blair, 'Speech by the Prime Minister at the Lord Mayor's Banquet, 12 November 2001.'

⁴⁹ Tony Blair, 'Prime Minister's Speech to the US Congress, 18 July 2003.'

<http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page4220.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007. See also Tony Blair, 'Extremism: The Rules of the Game Have Changed and We Need to Respond' - Article published in the Muslim Press, 23 August 2005',

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029391629&a=KArticle&aid=1123951820561>, accessed 23 May 2007.

The implications of this reversal were significant, for while the earlier analysis suggested tackling poverty and underdevelopment should be a security priority, this understanding of the situation commended more direct intervention in religious beliefs and practices. As Blair put it, this terrorism ‘comes from a perversion of the true faith of Islam, and the way of dealing with it is not simply through the security measures that governments have got to take to protect their people, but through tackling the roots of it which lie in extreme and fanatical teaching of this perversion of Islam’.⁵⁰

What Blair meant by this was more far-reaching than some early liberal approaches to managing religious conflict discussed in chapter 4. It will be recalled that Locke gave the magistrate the right to intervene and prohibit religious practices when they were harmful to the security of the commonwealth. However, Locke regarded speculative beliefs and opinions – the true heart of religion – as beyond the legitimate power of the sovereign. Harm was to be evaluated in terms of its material effects. For Blair, the task was to eliminate the beliefs themselves, rather than simply insist they should remain as beliefs:

This terrorism will not be defeated until its ideas, the poison that warps the minds of its adherents, are confronted, head-on, in their essence, at their core. By this I don't mean telling them terrorism is wrong. I mean telling them their attitude to America is absurd; their concept of governance pre-feudal; their positions on women and other faiths, reactionary and regressive...⁵¹

The military and juridical instruments of security were still necessary, but they must be used alongside ‘anti-corruption’ measures defending normal or genuine Islam itself: ‘The only answer is both to defeat them by security, intelligence and policing but also to take head on, especially within the Muslim world, their perversion of Islam in the cause of extremism. I remain of the view that it is not just the methods of extremism but their ideas that must be countered’.⁵²

Advocating this line of attack committed Blair to contesting the extremists understanding of their own faith. As he acknowledged, it involved engaging ‘with

⁵⁰ Tony Blair, 'Press Conference between Tony Blair and Manmohan Singh, 8 September 2005.' <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page8152.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

⁵¹ Blair, "'Clash about Civilisations" Speech, 21 March 2006.'

⁵² Tony Blair, 'PM's Statement on EU Summit in Brussels, 28 October 2002.' <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page1730.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

mainstream Islam at a theological as well as a political level'.⁵³ But how was this to be done? It is highly problematic in a liberal society for the state to act as theologian and become too overtly involved in regulating religion, and even more so when the state is nominally Christian and the problematic tradition is Islam. The answer Blair supplied was that we had to be 'helping those within the faith of Islam who are speaking out in favour of moderation, tolerance and sense'.⁵⁴ This involved a kind of intervention by proxy, supporting the forces of 'moderate Islam'. It was noted in chapter 4 that this is what the United States has been doing, albeit on a larger scale. But Blair was articulating the same approach, in his claim that reform must come from within:

We need a twin track approach. One, within the Moslem world, is to take on the fanatics, the extremists who warp the true message of Islam, which is caring and decent. That can only be done by the true voice of Islam itself; it can't be imposed from outside. And it must deal with the fanaticism head-on; the schools that teach it, those who preach it, the political extremism that feeds on it.⁵⁵

The logic of this intervention by proxy was illustrated in an initiative proposed in the wake of the 7 July attacks. Seven community-led working groups were set up in cities with large Muslim populations in order to develop proposals for governmental and government-supported community projects to prevent extremism. One of the major proposals subsequently implemented was the 'Empowering Voices of Mainstream Islam' roadshow, involving a group of international scholars organising conferences and seminars around the country 'in order to disseminate effective intellectual and theological counter-arguments against extremist interpretations of Islam'.⁵⁶ The roadshow was presented as a grassroots initiative coming out of the Muslim community itself, but it was subsequently revealed that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office had planned the project in advance and presented it to the working groups as a completed product.⁵⁷

⁵³ Tony Blair, 'Prime Minister's Speech at the Foreign Office Conference, 7 January 2003.' <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page1765.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Tony Blair, 'Britain and India: A New Partnership for a Better and Safer World, 5 January 2002.' <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029391647&a=KArticle&aid=1013618416373>, accessed May 23 2007.

⁵⁶ Yusuf Islam et al., 'Preventing Extremism Together Working Group Report' (London: Home Office, 2005), p. 14.

⁵⁷ Martin Bright, 'The Task Force Was a Sham', *New Statesman*, 3 July 2006.

Where matters of security are at stake, the Government had to ensure that the working groups would make the right decision. In that it was seeking to regulate indirectly here rather than through the force of law, this strategy was closer to Adam Smith's approach to the government of religion than that of juridical-political liberals such as Hobbes and Locke. However, Smith wanted the state to abstain from any kind of intervention in religion whatsoever, in order that the market might work its magic among the melancholic and gloomy humours of 'enthusiasm'. The roadshow can be understood, perhaps, as a New Labour 'Third Way' strategy – keen to be seen as doing something, but not wanting to be associated with big government.

Yet this governmental involvement in promoting good forms of Islam against bad forms effectively erases the boundary between religion and politics. Just as it was observed in chapter 2 that the growing political voice of religious movements subverts easy assumptions about what constitutes a religious and a political objective, one can see the same dynamic in operation from the other direction. When the Government involves itself in the internal arguments of a religious tradition, is this a religious or a political action? Questions remain also about the agenda being promoted. What kind of religion was being defined as 'mainstream Islam'? Who decides what counts as mainstream or moderate?

This was the issue identified in chapter 4 – that the evaluation of good and bad religion requires some standard for differentiating between various forms. The difference between moderate and extremist religion was, in one sense, violence. Extremism corrupts peaceful faith traditions in the direction of violence. But the difference between moderate and extremist religion is more complicated than this, because it is not simply the resort to violence that identifies extremism, despite some pious rhetoric to that effect. After all, nobody in the Government has suggested that moderate Muslims should refrain from violence altogether. Otherwise, what should one make of the campaign to increase the number of Muslims in the armed forces?⁵⁸ Blair's belief that the war in Iraq may have been right in the eyes of God similarly suggests that it is not the association of religion with violence which is reviled in itself.⁵⁹ What distinguished the violence of extremism from the violence sanctioned by the liberal state?

The short answer is that the violence of the state was justifiable in defence of liberal values, because only when these values were instantiated in social, political and

⁵⁸ BBC News, 'Armed Forces 'Want More Muslims'', <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4343531.stm>, accessed 14 August 2007.

⁵⁹ Andy McSmith, 'Blair: "God will be my judge on Iraq"', *Independent*, 4 March 2004.

economic structures could one achieve the security, freedom and prosperity desired by ordinary people around the world. Security was no longer about defending the state from external threats, Blair declared, but about defending values.⁶⁰ He outlined this standpoint in his 1999 'Doctrine of the International Community' speech in Chicago, in which he argued that

No longer is our existence as states under threat. Now our actions are guided by a more subtle blend of mutual self interest and moral purpose in defending the values we cherish. In the end values and interests merge. If we can establish and spread the values of liberty, the rule of law, human rights and an open society then that is in our national interests too. The spread of our values makes us safer.⁶¹

In this short passage, Blair expressed the circular idea that these values are not only valuable in themselves, but their survival is important for creating the conditions of peace and security in which they can be enjoyed. Threats to these values are also threats to security.

To understand why this should be the case, it is helpful to relate Blair's understanding of security to the liberal political economy paradigm, in which it will be recalled that stability, order and prosperity were conceived as spontaneously generated through the behaviour of free individuals in various marketplaces. The processes through which positive social outcomes were secured demanded a certain orientation on behalf of government, as Adam Smith's recommendations on the government of religion illustrated. They demanded that the free and natural operation of these social dynamics should be respected by government. Blair inherited this understanding of the freedom within society as necessary for security and prosperity.

The basic features of his governmental paradigm were laid out in his Chicago speech quoted above.⁶² Excessive governmental intervention was condemned as harmful, although Blair sought to steer a middle way between 'big government' and 'no government'. Thus within Blair's communitarian or 'Third Way' approach, the *laissez-faire* element was qualified by a vague notion of community, by which he meant 'the belief

⁶⁰ The approach to security as the defence of values was not, in itself, new. See Wolfers, "'National Security' as an Ambiguous Symbol".

⁶¹ Tony Blair, 'Prime Minister's Speech: Doctrine of the International Community at the Economic Club, Chicago, 24 April 1999', <http://www.number10.gov.uk/output/Page1297.asp>, accessed 9 October 2007.

⁶² Ibid.

that partnership and co-operation are essential to advance self-interest'.⁶³ Nevertheless, cooperation had to take place within the rules of good government imposed by the objective laws of the market, which operated globally in a uniform fashion. An additional twist was added by the notions of globalisation and interdependence, which meant that domestic economic, social, political, religious and security problems were often caused on the other side of the world.

This specific understanding of the social dynamics through which security and prosperity could be achieved in a globalising, interdependent world provided the background against which religion was classified and categorised. Blair differentiated different types of religion by locating them within a dualist understanding of the world, comprised of those who were in favour of open borders, free markets, liberal government and interfaith engagement and those who were not. The struggle between moderate and extremist Islam was located by Blair within a broader struggle over how political, economic and religious life should be ordered, a struggle between 'open' and 'closed' views of the world, a struggle between progress and reaction. Extremism was perceived as a problem in three ways: firstly, the acts of violence it inspired directly threatened the life and property of individuals; secondly, they indirectly threatened the liberal peace by interrupting the economic processes through which prosperity was secured, creating poverty which then led to violence; and thirdly, religious extremism was a threat where government was conducted according to its precepts rather than those of liberalism. Blair's understanding of what was necessary for security was laid out most fully in his prescriptions about good government, and it is these that will next be discussed.

6.3 Security, Liberal Government and Religious Extremism

Within Blair's foreign policy discourse, security is constantly equated with good government and freedom. As was noted in chapter 4, liberal conceptions of government assume that constant interventions in the behaviour of individuals will be detrimental not only to the goals of national economic prosperity but also internal social order. The interests of each are spontaneously harmonised by the invisible hand of the market, most famously in the economic realm but also in other dimensions of life – in religion, for example, the market would tend to produce a multitude of modest, rational and peaceful sects when allowed to operate unhindered by state intervention. This was, to some extent,

⁶³ Ibid.

also the case with security. While Smith was convinced that the law was needed to restrain those who would threaten the property and goods of others, he also argued that the lack of freedom within a population would itself generate crime and social disorder.⁶⁴ In contrast to the earlier idea developed with *raison d'état* rationalities of government that the security of the state depended on a detailed and continuous regulation of people and their behaviour, liberalism suggests that the goal of security is best served through the creation of conditions in which individuals can exercise their freedom.⁶⁵

The importance of freedom for liberal rationalities of government is connected to the claim that the workings of society constitute a 'quasi-nature' composed of a variety of natural processes, such as economic activity, the development of population, language and morality. Government can only be successfully conducted in accordance with the laws of that nature, the laws which govern the processes by which civil society generates its own order and prosperity.⁶⁶ These processes were now conceived as essentially autonomous areas of life, constituted by the free actions of individuals, in which natural equilibrium and the common good are the unintended outcomes of these individuals' pursuit of their own objectives.⁶⁷ Beneficial social and economic outcomes are conceived within liberal thought as the result of processes that are autonomous; good government therefore means respecting the integrity of these processes and governing in accordance with them.

The need to respect the freedom of social and economic processes is matched by the need to respect the individual freedom necessary for the market to function. This requires a certain amount of restraint on the part of the state; in this way liberalism constitutes a critique of excessive government. Freedom thus appears within liberal thought not simply as an individual right to be defended from the predations and abuses of an interventionary sovereign or government, but as an indispensable element in the government of society. For liberalism then, 'a condition of governing well is that freedom, or certain forms of freedom, are really respected. Failing to respect freedom is not only an abuse of rights with regard to the law, it is above all ignorance of how to govern properly'.⁶⁸

As I noted above, security and freedom are never far apart in Blair's rhetoric, and his framing of their relationship is essentially in accord with the liberal rationality of

⁶⁴ Hindess, *Discourses of Power: From Hobbes to Foucault*, pp. 126-127.

⁶⁵ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*; Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

⁶⁶ Gordon, 'Governmental Rationality: An Introduction', p. 15.

⁶⁷ Hindess, 'Politics and Governmentality', p. 267.

⁶⁸ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, p. 353.

government. Security and freedom are commonly thought to be rival goods, values that exist in competitive tension and demand from policymakers a continual 'trade-off' between them. The anarchy of unrestrained liberty seems to threaten security, while excessive restrictions on freedom in the name of security threaten authoritarianism. From this perspective though, security is also a functional good, a necessary condition for the practical exercise of freedom.⁶⁹

This understanding of freedom as functional, a prerequisite of security, is present in Blair's rhetoric. For example, during a press conference with President Bush in 2004, Blair responded to a question about tough security measures in Iraq with the argument that they are implemented 'in order to guarantee freedom for people, not to take it away...it is not going to be about taking away people's freedoms, it is about allowing those freedoms to happen'.⁷⁰ Blair therefore represented security as necessary for freedom; he did not represent them as being in competition with one another but mutually complementary. Whilst freedom is dependent upon security, security cannot be had without freedom. In a speech to the U.S. Congress in 2003, Blair asserted that 'the spread of freedom is the best security for the free',⁷¹ and in an interview for Channel 4 News in 2004 he argued that 'ultimate security lies in the spread of democracy and freedom'.⁷² In 2006 he repeated that 'long term I have come to the conclusion that actually it is only through the spread of liberty, and democracy, and the rule of law and basic respect for human rights that we will get peace and security'.⁷³ Security was represented as both dependent upon, and a precondition of, the spread of liberty around the world. In representing freedom not simply as a moral good, but as an instrumental value necessary for security, Blair was articulating a understanding of the relationship between freedom and security that emerged from a specifically liberal rationality of government.

Principles of government

⁶⁹ See Jef Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), pp. 86-89.

⁷⁰ Blair, 'Transcript of Press Conference given by the Prime Minister and the US President, Mr George Bush'.

⁷¹ Blair, 'Prime Minister's Speech to the US Congress, 18 July 2003.'

⁷² Tony Blair, 'Transcript of Interview for Channel 4 News Given by the Prime Minister, 28 June 2004.' <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page6044.asp> accessed 9 May 2007.

⁷³ Blair, 'Speech to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, 1 August 2006'.

Security is dependent on limited government, but it is also dependent in governing through certain institutions and according to particular policies that have proven themselves effective. Successful government, from the liberal perspective, is dependent on the efficient operation of processes that are essentially autonomous, or non-political. This means that good government is a matter of governing in accordance with quasi-natural social processes and respecting their integrity. Good government follows the rules and principles intrinsic to the work of governing a community. Liberal government is for this reason essentially a technical endeavour, a question of 'what works' in relation to these market dynamics. 'What works' is determined by criteria of the efficient functioning of natural processes operative in the market and civil society more broadly. If these processes are to function optimally, they must be allowed to operate unhindered.

Politics, for Blair, is a matter of applying timeless abstract principles – universal values – that must be realised in within the constraints of the real world. 'The only purpose of being in politics is to strive for the values and ideals we believe in: freedom, justice, what we Europeans call solidarity but you might call respect for and help for others. These are the decent democratic values we all avow. But alongside the values we know we need a hard headed pragmatism - a *realpolitik* - required to give us any chance of translating those values into the practical world we live in'.⁷⁴ This is perhaps uncontroversial, but what it means depends on what one sees out there in the 'real world'. Blair saw the spontaneous, wealth producing dynamics of the marketplace, first theorised by the political economists described in chapter 4.

In the economic sphere, failing to respect the laws by which the invisible hand of the market does its work results in the breakdown of the mechanism, a swift punishment for governmental ineptitude. As Blair expresses the idea, 'Any government that thinks it can go it alone is wrong. If the markets don't like your policies they will punish you. The same is true of trade. Protectionism is the swiftest road to poverty. Only by competing internationally can our companies and our economics grow and succeed'.⁷⁵ On another occasion, Blair commented that 'Nowadays, it is pretty clear what governments have to do to promote prosperity. Macroeconomic policy is no longer left or right. It is right or wrong'.⁷⁶ There is therefore a certain objectivity in the demands of the economy.

⁷⁴ Tony Blair, 'Prime Minister's Speech at the George Bush Senior Presidential Library, 7 April 2002.' <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page1712.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

⁷⁵ Blair, 'Prime Minister's Speech: Doctrine of the International Community at the Economic Club, Chicago, 24 April 1999'.

⁷⁶ Blair, 'Prime Minister's Speech to the Global Ethics Foundation, Tübingen University, Germany, 30 June 2000.'

Governments which attempt to reshape the economy according to ideological principles rather than the principles of efficient operation immanent in the economy itself will come to grief.

It is not only in the economy that good government must conform to certain principles that have proved effective. In all areas of governmental concern, he believed that 'The political debates of the 20th century - the massive ideological battleground between left and right - are over. Echoes remain, but they mislead as much as they illuminate'.⁷⁷ Ideological politics have been replaced by a growing consensus around 'certain key ideas and principles', relating to what governments must do to be effective, that he saw emerging around the world.⁷⁸ Controversial questions of how our common life together might be ordered were set aside in favour of a technocratic derivation of 'rules' of government from principles taken to be internal to the workings of the contemporary political, social and economic worlds. These guidelines are supposedly clear, as Blair argued in a speech in India in 2002:

For most politicians, ready to listen and learn from an analysis of the developments of the last few years, the basic rules of what works and what doesn't, what advances a nation and what holds it back, are increasingly plain. In any country I visit, from the mighty USA to still impoverished Bangladesh, the basic rules are there to be followed. It's not always easy to follow them, of course; but it is relatively easy to discern them.⁷⁹

The 'basic rules' he outlined include a free market economy, democracy, adaptation to the requirements of the global economy, and the management of potentially disruptive social phenomena that accompany such change. These were represented by Blair as 'rules' of government, principles that can be abstracted from the internal workings of the contemporary social, political and economic worlds. There was no place for the social projects of religious traditions in these worlds, which had their own autonomous rationalities that government must respect and work with.

An assumption Blair was making here was that principles of good government are universal; what works in one context will work in another. The optimal solution to a problem faced in one part of the world will be the best response to the same problem

⁷⁷ Blair, 'Prime Minister's Speech: Doctrine of the International Community at the Economic Club, Chicago, 24 April 1999'.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Blair, 'Britain and India: A New Partnership for a Better and Safer World, 5 January 2002.'

faced in another part of the world. Blair can thus represent neo-liberal modes of government as a natural response to a globalising world in which governments increasingly face the same challenges:

As problems become global - competitiveness, changes in technology, crime, drugs, family breakdown - so the search for solutions becomes global too. What amazes me, talking to other countries' leaders, is not the differences but the points in common. We are all coping with the same issues: achieving prosperity in a world of rapid economic and technological change; social stability in the face of changing family and community mores; a role for Government in an era where we have learnt Big Government doesn't work, but no Government works even less.⁸⁰

Good government was therefore represented by Blair as a technocratic art, whose basic rules can be extracted from observation of what works in particular contexts.

How does all of this relate to religion? Blair's version of true religion is consistent with liberal thinking on government in at least one important respect. He represents religion as forming particular kinds of subjects who behave in a reasonable, responsible manner. This can be interpreted in terms of the liberal concern for promoting *particular kinds* of freedom, for ensuring that freedom is exercised in accordance with 'the standards of civility, orderliness and reason required for the proper functioning of state agencies, markets, households and other aspects of social life'.⁸¹ In other words they must not conduct themselves in ways that do not threaten the workings of the 'natural' processes on which their security depends.⁸² Thus while liberalism can be understood as a critique of excessive governmental intervention in spheres of life held to be non-political, it has from the beginning maintained a concern with ensuring that public and private

⁸⁰ Blair, 'Prime Minister's Speech: Doctrine of the International Community at the Economic Club, Chicago, 24 April 1999'. In rejecting both 'big government' and 'no government', Blair is articulating a neo-liberal critique of preceding forms of liberalism: the social liberalism or 'welfarism' of the mid-twentieth century, and the classical liberalism of the nineteenth century. It is probable that when he referred to 'no government', Blair had Thatcherism in mind, and was (mistakenly) associating it directly with classical liberalism. As Dean points out, Thatcherism represents a distinctively neo-liberal mode of government, and should be understood as a predecessor of communitarian or 'Third Way' thinking which is in essential continuity with it. Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, pp. 149-175. See also Graham Burchell, 'Liberal Government and Techniques of the Self', in Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose (eds.), *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-liberalism and Rationalities of Government* (London: UCL Press, 1996).

⁸¹ Hindess, 'Politics and Governmentality', p. 268.

⁸² Burchell, 'Liberal Government and Techniques of the Self', p. 22; Hindess, 'Politics and Governmentality', p. 268.

behaviour is conducted in accordance with certain norms.⁸³ In this sense, Blair's invocation of religion as propagating values important for the functioning of society can be understood as consistent with the neo-liberal idea that such regulation should be cultural, as it can no longer be political (given the retraction of the responsibilities of formal political authority) or social (in the wake of the welfare state).⁸⁴

Attention to the liberal governmental themes in Blair's rhetoric also provides interesting insights into his classification of religion. The distinction between moderate and extremist religion was identified by Blair as a crucial manifestation of a broader divide in world politics between those who recognise the need to govern according to liberal governmental principles and those who do not. In a major foreign policy speech in 2006 to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, he put it in these terms:

For me, a victory for the moderates means an Islam that is open: open to globalisation, open to working with others of different faiths, open to alliances with other nations. In this way, this struggle is in fact part of a far wider debate. Though Left and Right still matter in politics, the increasing divide today is between open and closed. Is the answer to globalisation, protectionism or free trade? Is the answer to the pressure of mass migration, managed immigration or closed borders? Is the answer to global security threats, isolationism or engagement? Those are very big questions for the U.S. and for Europe. Without hesitation, I am on the open side of the argument. The way for us to handle the challenge of globalisation is to compete better, more intelligently, more flexibly. We have to give our people confidence we can compete. See competition as a threat and we are already on the way to losing.⁸⁵

It was argued in chapters 4 and 5 that accounts of what security means and how it might be achieved have, within liberalism, determined the kinds of religion that are acceptable. Moderate Islam is here represented by Blair as an Islam that is compatible with a particular understanding of government – government of itself and the government of states. Moderate Muslims are those who have a particular attitude towards those of other faiths, and who accept a narrative that represents security and prosperity as grounded in liberal democracy and adaptation to the demands of a free market economy. Closed

⁸³ See the discussion from this perspective of Locke's ideas on reforming thought and behaviour in Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts*, pp. 179-241.

⁸⁴ Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, p. 162.

⁸⁵ Blair, 'Speech to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, 1 August 2006'.

views, on this account, are those which display an unwillingness to adjust to contemporary realities and make the necessary reforms. In religious extremism, this tendency towards a closed worldview is not simply conservatism, a reluctance to change, but an active attempt to turn back the clock: 'the fanatical, reactionary elements of global terrorism, based on a false view of Islam, are in reality, a revolt against the modern world'.⁸⁶

The collision of these two perspectives in the contemporary world, Blair maintained, was 'Not a clash between civilisations. It is a clash about civilisation. It is the age-old battle between progress and reaction, between those who embrace and see opportunity in the modern world and those who reject its existence; between optimism and hope on the one hand; and pessimism and fear on the other.'⁸⁷ The outcome of the battle between 'those who embrace and those who resist the modern world'⁸⁸ was of vital importance, and not only in terms of economic prosperity. Failure to abide by the rules of good government not only 'holds nations back', but has implications for security in an interdependent world.

Government and security

The importance of good government in Blair's foreign policy discourse can be traced back to a concern with security. As evidenced by Adam Smith's comments on the link between interventionary governmental practices and insecurity, there is an intimate connection in liberal thought between security and the smooth functioning of quasi-natural processes in society. These processes must themselves be secured, both from external threats to their operation and from mismanagement by those who seek to govern by principles other than those internal to society itself.

One such threat to the operation of natural social processes comes from terrorism motivated by extremist religion. It is not only directly threatening to life and limb, but through undermining the 'natural' processes through which the public good is generated. The threat terrorism presented to the stability of markets and economic life is a recurring theme of Blair's rhetoric. 'The most obvious lesson' that Blair sees in the attacks of 11 September is 'our interdependence. For a time the world stood still. Quite

⁸⁶ Tony Blair, 'Speech to News Corps, 30 July 2006', <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page9937.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

⁸⁷ Blair, "'Clash about Civilisations" Speech, 21 March 2006.'

⁸⁸ Blair, 'Speech to News Corps, 30 July 2006'.

apart from our security, the shock impacted on economic confidence, on business, on trade and it is only now with the terrorist network on the run, that confidence is really returning'.⁸⁹ It is not only economic processes that are endangered, for terrorism threatens a more widespread chaos and instability: 'The purpose of terrorism is not the single act of wanton destruction. It is the reaction it seeks to provoke: economic collapse; the backlash; the hatred; the division; the elimination of tolerance'.⁹⁰ In one of his more hyperbolic moments, Blair even suggests that the chaos and disorder that terrorism brings creates the conditions in which even a world war might become possible:

the threat that we face today, the threat that our country faces from other countries around the world, is not the one that certainly my generation grew up with, it is not the prospect of a big world war where countries are fighting each other, you can never discount that, but it is highly improbable, except I suppose in one set of circumstances, and those are the circumstances of chaos, and that chaos comes today from terrorism, from a particular virus of Islamic extremism that is a perversion of the true faith of Islam, but is nonetheless incredibly dangerous and which you see literally in every part of the world.⁹¹

The efficient operation of social and economic processes is not only threatened by irregular irruptions of violence by non-state actors. It is also endangered by bad government that does not respect the autonomy of supposedly non-political spheres such as the economy. Bad government can be a result of 'faction': the use of governmental apparatus for the promotion of disputed interests or values. This undermines the proper government of the state, which should be conducted in accordance with principles internal to the population rather external principles such as an order of nature ordained by God.⁹² Good government is not driven by theological visions, but is primarily a technical, managerial art. The important implication of this is that traditions within Islam, Christianity or other religions which refuse the liberal compartmentalisation of 'religion' as a sphere of life distinct from economics and politics are liable to be perceived as threatening the natural operation of social processes through the introduction of 'alien' theological principles. Any attempt to govern on the basis of religious principles rather than according to the principles thought to be intrinsic to the

⁸⁹ Blair, 'Prime Minister's Speech at the George Bush Senior Presidential Library, 7 April 2002.'

⁹⁰ Blair, 'Prime Minister's Speech to the US Congress, 18 July 2003.'

⁹¹ Tony Blair, 'PM thanks UK Armed Forces in Basra Visit, 4 January 2004.'

<http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page5094.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

⁹² Hindess, 'Politics and Governmentality', pp. 258-270.

work of governing a community appears dangerously misguided, irresponsible or malign. From this perspective, the kind of government attempted by the 'fanatical, religiously motivated dictatorship'⁹³ of the Taliban was destined to fail with disastrous consequences.

Blair's representation of the failings of the Taliban can be understood as a critique of the consequences of bad or incompetent government. In an article written by Blair in 2001 for the Muslim media in Britain, Blair catalogues the governmental failures of a regime that is 'intolerant and backward-looking'.⁹⁴ Indeed, the failures of the Taliban regime are represented as directly connected to its regressive attitude towards economic and social governance and its hostility towards any measure of freedom in a society. The Taliban is 'against any form of modernisation and economic progress', and as a consequence,

Public administration is chaotic and getting worse. The country is desperately poor and getting poorer because of the regime's policies. Teachers, doctors and other educated Afghans have been forced to flee or live in terror. Because the Kabul regime has so badly mismanaged the economy, people are starving.⁹⁵

The only efficient governmental institution is that which is devoted to restricting Afghans' freedom:

Virtually the only arm of civil government that functions effectively is the Ministry of Enforcement of Virtue and the Suppression of Vice. This Ministry enforces strict observance of Taliban decrees on social and moral behaviour which bear scant relationship to the teachings of Islam. But they are ruthlessly imposed.⁹⁶

Importantly, the Taliban's government in Afghanistan is not represented by Blair as being exceptional, but as paradigmatic of what happens when religious extremism gains power: 'What he [bin Laden] represents is a form of extremism that would cause huge

⁹³ Tony Blair, 'Our Nation's Future - Defence, 12 January 2007', <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page10735.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

⁹⁴ Blair, 'Article by the Prime Minister for the Muslim Media, 12 October 2001.'

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

repression and tragedy in every part of the world that it is tried and you only have to see what the Taliban regime have done to their own people to realise it'.⁹⁷

From the perspective of liberal governmentality, governmental incompetence and arbitrary restriction of freedom is not simply problematic in terms of morality or social justice, but in terms of security. If security and prosperity are dependent on liberty in a society, rule by religious extremists will tend inevitably towards instability, chaos and poverty. The consequence of failing to protect or not respecting the laws of the market is economic breakdown. This can be problematised in moral terms, as when Blair argued that 'Economic competence is the pre-condition of social justice'.⁹⁸ However, poverty is not primarily a matter of justice from a governmentality perspective, and this can be seen in a longstanding construction of poverty as a security concern within liberal thought. From the eighteenth century onwards the widespread poverty that accompanied rapid industrialisation began to appear threatening to the wealth and position of the property owning classes. The rise of domestic welfare arrangements was connected to a concern for security.⁹⁹ Jeremy Bentham argued for domestic poor relief as necessary to prevent dangers to the security of individuals, the state, and property.

At the international level, fear of poverty and the dangerous poor has become an integral part of international development assistance.¹⁰⁰ The post-Cold War broadening of the security agenda to include non-military issues, and its convergence with development, can therefore be understood as fully consistent with a liberal rationality of security.¹⁰¹ As Rita Abrahamsen notes, the strongly-made connection between poverty and insecurity in New Labour's foreign policy discourse is the latest expression of this concern. Underdevelopment and state failure were represented by the British Government as the main cause of conflict, and sustainable development accordingly became the cornerstone of its conflict prevention strategy.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Tony Blair, 'Transcript of Joint Press Conference Between the Prime Minister Tony Blair, and the President of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf in Islamabad, 5 October 2001.' <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page1614.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

⁹⁸ Tony Blair, 'Prime Minister's Statement at 10 Downing Street, 25 September 2001', <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page1604.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

⁹⁹ Giovanna Procacci, 'Social Economy and the Government of Poverty', in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

¹⁰⁰ Rita Abrahamsen, 'Blair's Africa: The Politics of Securitization and Fear', *Alternatives* vol. 30 (2005), p. 63; Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, p. 116.

¹⁰¹ Abrahamsen, 'Blair's Africa: The Politics of Securitization and Fear'; Rothschild, 'What is Security?'; UNDP, *Human Development Report 1994*.

¹⁰² Abrahamsen, 'Blair's Africa: The Politics of Securitization and Fear'.

Development programmes are not simply a matter of disinterested benevolence though. Poverty and conflict in distant corners of the globe can become an issue of direct relevance in the context of global interdependence. In his 1999 speech on the doctrine of international community, he declared that 'We are all internationalists now, whether we like it or not...We cannot turn our backs on conflicts and the violation of human rights within other countries if we want still to be secure'.¹⁰³ The events of 9/11 confirmed the lesson that instability in one part of the globe can spill over into others, threatening lives and property on the other side of the world. In Blair's words, 'We are realising how fragile are our frontiers in the face of the world's new challenges. Today conflicts rarely stay within national boundaries'.¹⁰⁴ While globalisation creates new opportunities, it has its own perils: 'it is very rare today that trouble in one part of the globe remains limited in its effect. Not just in security, but in trade and finance – witness the crisis of 1998 which began in Thailand and ended in Brazil – the world is interlocked...So today, more than ever, "their" problem becomes "our" problem'.¹⁰⁵ Poverty and instability lead to chaos, and chaos threatens the order and stability of the civilised world. According to Blair,

Today the threat is chaos; because for people with work to do, family life to balance, mortgages to pay, careers to further, pensions to provide, the yearning is for order and stability and if it doesn't exist elsewhere, it is unlikely to exist here. I have long believed this interdependence defines the new world we live in.¹⁰⁶

The poverty, instability and chaos created by the Taliban in Afghanistan was not simply morally abhorrent, but represented a source of danger to those on the other side of the world. In Blair's words, 'the simplest act of fanaticism carried out in a state thousands of miles from us is of significance on the streets of London or in the villages of County Durham'.¹⁰⁷ In an interdependent world then, the security of all is dependent on good government by all; religious extremism represents a threat through bad government when it holds formal political power, and the acts of violence it causes when it does not.

¹⁰³ Blair, 'Prime Minister's Speech: Doctrine of the International Community at the Economic Club, Chicago, 24 April 1999'.

¹⁰⁴ Blair, 'Speech to the Labour Party Conference'.

¹⁰⁵ Blair, 'Prime Minister's Speech at the George Bush Senior Presidential Library, 7 April 2002.'

¹⁰⁶ Blair, 'Speech to the Labour Party Conference'.

¹⁰⁷ Tony Blair, 'PM Speech at the Lord Mayor's Banquet, 11 November 2002.'
<http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page1731.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined Blair's representation of 'authentic' religion, his analysis of the relationship between religion and violence, and the conception of good government against which different modes of religion were classified. It has been argued that Blair's notion of religion and its normative relation to politics combined both the common ground discourse and the the differentiated religion discourse. What seemed at first a flat contradiction between respecting the proper business of the religious and political realms versus giving religion a central role in world affairs was ironed out through a specific conception of politically-relevant religion. Religion was conceived in minimal ethical terms, leaving the autonomous operation of the political and economic spheres basically untouched. At the same time, the diverse doctrines of religious traditions were excluded as being politically unhelpful. If this account is correct, then Blair's thinking on religion, politics and violence was structured by the discursive resources of the liberal tradition. The notion of an ethical common ground shared by the religions that represents their most significant feature was combined with the differentiation of the political and economic realms from any specific social visions of the religions, as well as an evaluation of different forms of religion based in part on their compatibility with a liberal governmental project of security.

The relationship between religion and violence was interpreted through the lens of a concept of religion as fundamentally benign, which initially privileged a denial of any connection between religious faith and terrorism. Gradually the burden of explanation shifted increasingly onto a perverted form of religion, away from poverty explanations which could not explain home-grown terrorism. This shift had consequences for the kind of solutions that were envisaged, encouraging the project of promoting moderate Islam.

The dichotomy of extremist and moderate religion was constructed not only in relation to the failure of extremism to fit the profile of moderate religion, but also in relation to a specifically liberal conception of security through good government. This rationality of government was represented as grounded in certain social and economic realities that could be neutrally specified independent of all religious traditions. The principles of liberal government were said to have revealed themselves to be universally effective in producing prosperity, peace and security; forms of religion which were consistent with liberal government were represented as 'true' or 'authentic', and those which did not were represented as deviations from this norm: dangerous 'distortions' or

'perversions'. Expressions of religion which were perceived to threaten the efficient operation of 'natural' processes within society, through violence or bad governance, were constructed as existential threats to the security of our 'way of life'. This non-liberal religion was contrasted with a normative conception of religion as not only at ease with but facilitating a liberal order. This specification of the true nature of religion functioned as an ideal against which all particular expressions of religion can be measured for their acceptability.

As has been noted, there was a politics *about* religion here, in which all faiths were being asked to conform to a model that looked a lot like liberal Christianity. There was also a politics *through* religion, as 'moderate religion' was that which does not upset the *status quo*. This is not to align with those who prefer brutal theocracies, but merely to note that the choice presented was between a crude extremism and moderate religion compatible with liberalism and capitalism. When it is put in these terms, it becomes difficult to voice religious opposition to the existing order without being tarred with the brush of 'extremism', however much one may equally reject this alternative. It is therefore not surprising that we see many Muslim leaders adopting the terms of Blair's discourse, emphasising how 'moderate' the majority of the Muslim community are. To reject Blair's concept of moderate religion would risk being seen as radical or extremist – with all the negative implications that follow.

A related problem comes with the representation of religion as essentially to do with abstract values rather than practical questions in the real historical world delegitimises any attempt to critique those social relations. Blair's combination of idealism and consequentialist pragmatism makes the unwarranted assumption that if we agree on the general goal of promoting peace and security, the only arguments left to have are technical discussions over 'what works'. Once we agree that security and prosperity are desirable goals, disagreement can only arise over the empirical assessment of the likely consequences of specific policies. By restricting ethical questions to the narrow sphere of 'values', he rules out ethical discussion of the real historical world and treats the liberal government and the market economy as facts – morally and religiously neutral means to achieving of prosperity and security. One consequence of this is that traditions of thought privileging a more substantive religious social vision are defined as deviant from the outset, as is political opposition cast in anything but the most general religious language.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ For a similar argument see Hurd, 'Theorizing Religious Resurgence'.

The point here is not that Blair has 'misrepresented' the true essence of religion, but that this is a very particular understanding of religion and its relationship to politics that is not acknowledged as such. It is represented as neutral, privileging no one religious perspective, and as not even affirming religious perspectives over secular standpoints, or vice versa. Blair has reified a conception of religion that emerged from within the logics and history of Christianity. Blair's discourse of religion is more than an empirical contention regarding its role. It is a regulative ideal that functions as a criterion for separating true religion from perversions of religion.

The second problematic assumption underlying Blair's framing of the relationship between religion and security concerns the secularity of the liberal rationality of government it articulates. By 'secularity' I mean here neutrality with regard to different religious traditions – the idea that the liberal thinking about government rests on impartial knowledge of the realities of human beings and human sociality that could unproblematically be assented to by any person, regardless of their own religious commitments. However, the liberal governmental idea that prosperity and order are spontaneously generated through the autonomous operation of certain laws according to which human social and economic processes operate itself relies upon quasi-theological assumptions. As recent research on eighteenth century political economy has concluded, the 'invisible hand of the market' was not just a metaphor but a kind of social theodicy which sought to explain and justify social order in terms of a benevolent providence, a 'divinely executed social design' in Milbank's phrase.¹⁰⁹ Theology entered into the very description of reality assumed by liberal political economy; to deny religious traditions the competence to provide alternative accounts social and economic realities is not only to forget the theology implicit in liberal thinking on government, but to demand that those of other religious traditions order their lives according to a model that derives from what is basically another theology, a theology which cannot, in the final instance, be rationally justified. This is a difficult and controversial demand to make not only for Muslims, Buddhists, Zoroastrians and humanists but also Christians who reject the particular understanding of God's relation to the world presupposed in eighteenth century natural theology, and by extension the necessity of a capitalist economic order.

Recognition that the political economy paradigm assumed by Blair's liberal mode of government is grounded in quasi-theological commitments does not imply the necessity of a more thorough-going secularisation of governmental assumptions. This

¹⁰⁹ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 39. See also Hill, 'The Hidden Theology of Adam Smith'.

would be to assume the possibility of a neutral, fully rational secular discourse of government and security. As John Milbank has argued though, the ‘secular’ label attached to apparently scientific social theories which claim to operate independently of any religious assumptions only serves to conceal the mythical, quasi-theological assumptions about human beings and human sociality which ground these theories. As he puts it, ‘secular discourse does not just borrow inherently inappropriate modes of expression from religion as the only discourse to hand (this is Hans Blumenberg’s interpretation), but is actually *constituted* in its secularity by ‘heresy’ in relation to orthodox Christianity, or else a rejection of Christianity that is more ‘neo-pagan’ than simply anti-religious’.¹¹⁰ By setting itself up as referring to a social and economic reality that is more ‘basic’ than the religious, Blair’s discourse of security conceals the arbitrary moments in its historical construction, the mythic-religious suppositions about the governing factors of human association that it depends upon. The problem is not that it is ultimately religious, but that it does not acknowledge its partial, confessional status.

¹¹⁰ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 3.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has had three aims. It has sought to denaturalise the concept of religion as it is conventionally used in international politics, politicise its construction, and examine the contribution of liberal security theory to the production of specific discourses of religion. This conclusion will summarise the argument, before drawing together the major findings of the thesis and discussing some of their implications.

Summary of the argument

The thesis began from the assumption that what religion means is a crucial question in the twenty-first century. Not ‘what does religion *really* mean?’, as if there was a true definition somewhere out there in the intellectual ether, but ‘what meanings are being conveyed when people refer to “religion”?’ It has been argued that this question is important for at least two reasons. The first is that what religion means is by no means as obvious as one might think. The second is that the meaning of the concept is at the heart of what are often passionate struggles over the place and role of religious traditions in liberal societies in the twenty-first century.

The first reason has been grounded in the assumption that religion is a discursively constructed category. This thesis has taken the view that the meaning of religion is neither self-evident nor stable, but constructed within the discourses in which it is named and defined. It does not exist independently of our shared consciousness that certain beliefs, practices and experiences are instances of it. Social construction has been understood here as a productive practice. Religion has been understood here as ‘produced’ in four major senses. First of all, describing religion as a certain kind of thing – as violent, as irrational, as moral etc – contributes to the sedimentation of the associative meanings that are variously invoked, depending on the context, whenever religion is referred to. Tony Blair’s concern, discussed in the final chapter, that religion carries associations of divisiveness, eccentricity, messianism and intolerance in the British context is a good example of this. Secondly, the connotation of religion – that which makes religion *religious* and sets it apart from other phenomena, such as belief in a God, reference to a transcendent realm etc – is similarly historically variable and discursively

constituted. The connotation of religion is shaped directly by debates over the abstract concept of religion itself, but also secondarily by internal debates within those traditions that are included within the category, about their character and purpose. Thirdly, the extension of the category – the range of phenomena that religion denotes – also varies historically, and is dependent to some extent on what the connotation of religion is taken to be. Finally, the way in which religion is internally classified – world religions and ethnic or tribal religions, moderate religion and extremism – is similarly subject to discursive negotiation. What religion means, in all four of these senses, varies historically.

It has also been argued that the question of what religion means is significant for a second reason: contemporary disputes over religion in modern liberal societies involve struggle over meanings as much as conflict over ends. The discursive production of religion is a political practice. Conflict over the place and role of religious traditions in the contemporary world is fought out within and through discourses of ‘religion’. Arguments over whether or not religion has been the major source of conflict in human history revolve in part around disagreements over what should count as religion for purposes of comparison, and can be interpreted as attempts to alter or defend the associative meanings through which religion is evaluated. The discourses in which the meaning of religion is constructed shape orientations towards religious traditions, affect what can legitimately be said and done from a religious standpoint and who can speak and act with authority on religion. They determine the form that religion can legitimately take in a society and its relation to various personal and social activities, sustaining and legitimising norms and laws enforcing these limits. Finally, they feed back into the internal debates over the proper character and purpose of religious traditions. To the extent that these discourses shape the practice of religion by extant religious traditions, they remake reality in their image, contributing to ‘what is there’ in the way of religion for later observers to theorise.

The theorisation of religion is a political practice then, and one at the centre of controversy over the implications of the worldwide resurgence of religion, but it is one that has received relatively little attention in the literature on religion in international politics. This thesis has sought to remedy this neglect. Noting the centrality of peace and security questions to recent controversies in this area, it has investigated the hypothesis that responses to violence associated with religion are significant sites at which discourses of religion are constructed and authorised. Given the importance of liberalism as the regnant political and governmental tradition in the West, this thesis has focused on how

the concept has been shaped by liberal understandings of how to manage 'religious violence'. Specifically, it has argued that two important modes of imagining religion in modernity received significant early authorisations as part of liberal strategies for the pacification of early modern European societies. The first was the idea that religion is a distinct realm of social practice, separate to politics, economics, art, science and so forth. The second is that religion is a genus of which the religions are species. These two ideas are deeply embedded in modern assumptions about religion, invariably taken for granted rather than scrutinised.

The first part of the thesis therefore represented a ground-clearing operation that sought to denaturalise these assumptions and highlight their political and contested nature. It was argued that they register important dimensions of contemporary struggles over the nature of religion, but also that a critical examination of these assumptions raises serious questions about the use of religion as an analytical and political concept in international politics.

The first chapter introduced these two assumptions about religion after introducing the idea of religion as a discursively constructed and politically contested concept. It argued that the political problem of what religion means had been largely neglected in the study of religion in International Politics, which had tended to consider the meaning of religion as a problem of definition. The chapter also located discussions of religion and security in IP in the context of broader public debates over the relationship of religion and violence. It was argued that this politics *about* religion can be understood as a struggle over the meaning of religion itself.

The second and third chapters argued that by failing to recognise the politics involved in speaking and writing about religion, scholars of international politics obscure the politics of their own theorising about religion. Chapter 2 took up the assumption that religion is one aspect of culture among others, with its own identity and logic not reducible to and naturally distinct from political- or economically-motivated activity. This assumption, it was argued in chapter 1, was implicit in many attempts to bring religion back into international politics, as well as much of the debate around whether conflict should be understood as driven by religion or material interest. It argued that this way of categorising social reality was an invention of the modern West, a product of the historical process of secularisation that conformed to a liberal vision of political order. Secularisation should be understood, it was proposed, as the discursive production of religion as a separate sphere of life with its own characteristic features, rather than the

separating out of what is essentially different or the liberation of the purely human from the 'domination' of religious meaning. Viewing the issue from this perspective raised the question of how religion came to be imagined as a differentiated sphere alongside other spheres. It commended examining the discourses through which societal differentiation is produced and contested, reinforced and undermined. This task was taken up with reference to liberal security discourse in chapter 4.

While chapter 2 proposed that there was a politics involved in the discursive separation of religion and non-religion, chapter 3 claimed a specific politics is brought into play once the religions are imagined as species of a common genus. The proposal here was that genus-and-species definitions would always be controversial, because there is no neutral criterion that can be used in deciding what should be included in the category. Beyond this, though, it was also suggested that the conventional imagination of religion as a genus in modernity had a more specific problem. The 'world religions' that were usually taken to comprise central instances of the class do not share any common features specific enough to justify marking a boundary between religious and non-religious phenomena. Definitions of religion veer down one of two paths: either they are so broad as to include all those aspects of human life which involve shared social meaning, or they project the categories and themes of one particular tradition onto religion as such. An important implication here was that insofar as religion is imagined as a genus, there will always be a political struggle over the meaning of the concept itself – an especially when that genus includes 'the world religions'. The discussion in this chapter also set the scene for chapter 5 in two ways. Firstly, it suggested an interesting puzzle: how did the world religions come to be imagined as instances of a single class that was more specific than human culture itself? The proposal here was that the discourse within which the religions are all species of a common genus needed to be explained rather than simply presupposed by political analyses and prescriptions. Secondly, the critique of religion-as-a-genus formed an important background for the critique of the common ground strategy in chapter 5.

Part I of the thesis sought to demonstrate that the politics *about* religion is not only concerned with whether religion and politics make a dangerous cocktail, whether religion can be a constructive force in the world, or with questions of how religious believers should comport themselves in relation to the political order and other faiths. It argued that the politics *about* religion does not begin after religion has been defined, but goes right down to the most basic assumptions about the concept itself. The push and

pull of conflict over meaning at this more abstract level is less obvious but more fundamental, as the scope and terms of the more explicit debate over religion are structured by deeper assumptions about what there is to discuss. The implication of this is that we should take the discursive constitution of religion seriously, examining the discourses through which particular concepts of religion are authorised, and the politics that are in turn authorised by particular assumptions about religion. It also identified two ways in which religion has commonly been conceptualised in modernity, and proposed that these assumptions are themselves important foci of the politics *about* religion. It argued that the first of these – the idea of differentiated religion – is precisely what is implicitly contested by the political resurgence of religion. The second of these – the idea that the religions have a common element – is itself a source of conflict, as every particular attempt to specify what that common factor is tends to privilege aspects of one religious tradition over others.

Part II turned to the task of identifying the discourses within which these particular approaches to understanding religion have been articulated. It argued that these two concepts of religion can be understood as being, at least in part, the conceptual residue of two different responses to religious violence put forward in the context of an emergent liberal politics in the seventeenth century. Chapter 4 took up and extended the argument developed in the second chapter, exploring the importance of security arguments in the differentiation of politics and religion and discussing a significant implication of this development. It argued that two dynamics contributed to the imagination of religion as a separate sphere. The first was the practical limitations on what could legitimately constitute an expression of religion that were imposed by a liberal strategy of separating religion from political power, justified in the name of peace and security. This had an effect on how religion could be lived out, changing what was there to be observed by later generations. The second dynamic was the justification of this invention of a religious sphere in terms of overcoming corruptions and distortions in religion, and returning it to its proper identity and rightful place. The creation of a separate religious domain was authorised by the beneficial security effects of such a move, but also by the argument that this is the form taken by true religion.

An important implication of this development was the emergence of secular notions of security that could serve as standards against which all expressions of religion are judged tolerable or intolerable. The differentiation of religion from political life within liberalism altered the relationship between the Christian tradition and the

achievement of peace. During the Middle Ages, peace was viewed as the highest goal of a distinctively Christian social project, achieved through the sacramental practices of the Church around which the life of communities revolved. During the early modern period, peace and security became objectives to be realised through the state or the market rather than the Church. Religion became a source of moral injunctions or private spiritual inspiration directing the individual believer to seek peace, but in practical terms this was now sought through the institutions of the state and the market. Security was separated from the social visions of particular religious communities and represented as belonging to a common secular realm of human desires. The consequence of this was that the perceived requirements of security function within liberalism as supposedly confession-independent norms against which all particular manifestations of religion are judged. But if concepts and theories of security and peace are derivative of deeper, tradition-governed assumptions about the nature of human beings and the possibilities of human association, there can be no neutral standpoint from which to define insecurity and specify threats.

Chapter 5 made a case for understanding the notion of religion as a genus as having emerged from the search for a lowest common denominator that could unite the religions, and discussed the problems involved with the continuing attraction of this strategy in the present day. It initially took up the puzzle identified in the third chapter: how was it, if the conventional concept of religion as a genus is so problematic empirically, did religion come to be so widely imagined in these terms? It was argued that peace-motivated lists of elements that the religions shared in common were drawn up in a period when little reliable evidence about non-Christian traditions was available, but much confessional dispute made concord an urgent imperative. The possibility of peace through the minimalist religion of the common ground was argued to serve the needs of the new state-centred security paradigm by having enough specific content (doctrines of a rewarding and punishing God) to sustain obedience to the law, but not enough to sustain an alternative social project to the sovereign state or to promote confessional conflict.

The legacy of this strategy was two fold: on the one hand, it contributed to the imagination of religion as a genus; on the other hand, it has persisted in more recent invocations of the common ground strategy – whose plausibility is itself sustained by assumption that the religions are instances of the same type. The common ground strategy suffers from all of the problems involved in attempts to define religion discussed in chapter 3. They avoid difficult questions about how who is included in the reckoning

when we decide what ‘we’ share in common; they cannot be as neutral as they purport to be; and they displace conflict rather than solving it. The prevailing common ground strategies have abandoned the search for common doctrines, yet those that stipulate common values or ethical principles do so in terms so general that they fail to take religious traditions seriously as social projects. Possible conflict over the meaning that might be given to concepts such as peace, freedom, or justice can only be headed off through appealing to some neutral, secular conception, which dissolves the common ground strategy into that of differentiation. The normative goals to be pursued in the public realms of politics and economics are given secular content, while religion then supplies the individual with an innocuous moral inspiration to work for the common good, within the limited terms of the liberal democratic state and the market.

Chapter 6 argued that the common ground and the differentiation of religion and politics are alive and well in the twenty-first century, and that security remains an important discourse in which they are constructed. It examined a contemporary liberal response to religious violence, by a figure who was inextricably implicated in the politics of religion. British Prime Minister Tony Blair was forced to take a position on the question of whether terrorism justified by reference to Islam was really religious, or an expression of poverty and socio-economic desperation. A particular concept of religion was central to both his reading of the problem, and his solution. Prior assumptions about the benign, ethical character of religion led him first to deny any connection between religion and violence, before reading terrorism as rooted in a perverted form of religion. Locating the problem in religious extremism privileged a religious solution, and Blair consequently emphasised how vital it was that moderate Islam should win a battle of ideas with extremism. Moderate religion was held up as the authentic voice of every religious tradition. The distinction between moderate and extremist religion was constructed not only on the basis of a religious ideal, but also with reference to a non-confessional theory of security, which linked security directly with freedom, prosperity and liberal governance.

Conclusions and implications

The conclusions of the thesis can be summarised in relation to the three aims outlined above. With regard to the first, the thesis has sought to denaturalise the concept of religion, arguing that it should be understood as a contingent category whose identity is

constructed discursively. More specifically, it has pointed to two significant features of the conceptualisation of religion in modernity, and argued that the empirical validity of these features should not be automatically assumed. The idea that religion is a subsection of culture in which action has its own distinctive characteristics merely reflects the construction of religion in the liberal, modern West. While the thought-forms and institutions of liberal modernity have been immensely influential around the world, it should not be assumed that they are necessarily universal. The belief that religion is a genus is not only a relatively recent mode of classification, it is also, in its conventional form, incoherent. There may be contingent overlaps among different traditions, but it would be a mistake to assume that there is a common core at the centre of all that is conventionally denoted 'religion'.

The second aim was to politicise discourses of religion. It has argued that there is both a politics *about* religion and a politics *through* religion. The idea of a politics *through* religion identified the participation of certain discourses of religion in the naturalisation and legitimation of particular political orders. The politics *about* religion is a contest over the proper character, form and purpose of religion, as well as where and how it can appropriately be expressed. This is most visible in arguments over the political and legal practices of recognition and inclusion, prohibition and exclusion, through which the conduct of religious people and the place and form of religion is managed by states on a day to day basis.

The politics *about* religion goes deeper than this though. A central contention of this thesis has been that there is a seamless continuity between these practices and the most abstract conceptual assumptions about the kind of things that are religious and the kind of thing religion is. These abstract intuitions are mediated through various discourses of religion circulating in society, discourses that structure what is considered normal and acceptable religion, what attitudes and behaviours are appropriate for religious believers and organisations, and what can or should be done about religion or its different manifestations, from persecuting, prohibiting and restricting to tolerating, respecting and celebrating. Often they are not reflected upon in any detail, but as the example of Blair indicated, they have real political effects shaping how events involving religion are interpreted and responded to, and even whether a development can be properly described as a matter of religion. Competing assumptions at the abstract level about what religion is and what it should be collide in competing visions of what ought to be done and what ought not.

The difficult issues this raises cannot be avoided. There can be no neutral settlement of the relationship between religion and politics, or the proper way in which religious traditions can be expressed, because there can be no statements about religion that do not make contentious judgments about the proper form, character and purpose of those traditions. This points to another continuity: between the broader societal politics *about* religion and the internal arguments through which the character and purpose of religious traditions are negotiated by those committed to them. In taking positions on what characterises religion most fundamentally or what it means to be religious, participants in broader societal debates are making judgments about issues that are themselves disputed within particular traditions. What religion *is* is constituted through normative debates over what religion should be within particular traditions, and judgements about what religion should be are shaped by assumptions about what religion *is*. Influence goes in both directions here. Internal discussions within religious communities about the purposes and ideal nature of their practices are not hermetically sealed from broader societal debates about religion, and neither are these public political discussions entirely insulated from religious discussions about their traditions. The upshot is that public representations of religion can be influenced by debates within traditions such as Christianity, or even involve explicit alignment with certain points of view within those traditions, exerting in turn a reciprocal force on how they are understood by their adherents. This is most apparent when claims about the ‘authentic voice’ of religion or the ‘true character’ of traditions such as Islam are made by politicians like Blair, along with calls to encourage moderate elements within a tradition.

The third aim of this thesis has been to examine how particular discourses of religion have been constructed within liberal accounts of security. It has been argued that the presence of religion on the security agenda is important for two reasons. Firstly, security concerns have historically provided important stimuli for the proliferation of statements about and classifications of religion, each of which reiterates or challenges its prevailing meanings and shapes evaluations of particular types of religion. Secondly, responses to violence associated with the phenomenon encourage the prohibition or reform of certain types of religion, the encouragement of others, and shape normative expectations about legitimate modes of belief and practice. The centrality of security as a theme in liberal politics, combined with the continuing association of religion with violence in many parts of the world, suggests that security discourse is likely to remain an important site for the production of religion for the foreseeable future.

This observation highlights the importance of understanding the particular discourses of religion contributed to the politics *about* religion by liberal responses to religious conflict. This thesis has suggested that liberal thinkers may have turned away from advocating the beliefs and practices of particular religious traditions as necessary for peace and security during the early modern period, but they tended instead to insist on a certain type of religion. This was, firstly, a minimal religion which sits alongside an individual's other commitments and identities rather than unifying, ordering and directing them; and, secondly, a religion in which features shared with other religions are regarded as being more significant than what is unique to one's own tradition. These prescriptions were partly the result of two different readings of the causes of religious conflict. The first argument, that conflict resulted from a failure to properly separate the spheres of politics and religion, commended differentiation and the liberal art of separation. The second argument was that conflict was a result of emphasising or imagining differences between religions, through either making exclusive claims to truth or salvation, or emphasising controversial (doctrinal) elements of religion over uncontroversial (ethical) elements. By promoting the practical implementation of these solutions in the conduct of religion and politics, and representing them as setting religion free to be religion, purified of corruptions or distortions, liberal thinkers contributed to the conceptual imagination of religion as a genus and a differentiated life-sphere.

This is the politics *about* religion. As has been noted, the thesis also sought to explore the politics *through* religion. The minimal, differentiated religion advocated here was religion compatible with the important institutions of security in a liberal order: the sovereign state and the free market. Both, in different ways, pre-empt possible religious opposition to that order. The secularisation of various spheres of life as non-religious by definition does this most obviously, but the notion that religion is a genus can also perform the same function, where the common elements are taken to be the most essential part of religion. The common ground strategy does just this, and, in the process, constructs religion in terms too general to sustain a viable social alternative.

A further important feature of the two liberal strategies of security identified here is their claim to avoid contentious religious claims by identifying certain beliefs and values religious people are already implicitly committed to. The differentiation strategy claims to be able to identify a basic set of human needs and desires around which politics can be constructed, whose meaning does not require further elaboration through the discourses, myths and theories of specific religious or cultural traditions. The common

ground strategy claims to identify beliefs and values already present in the religions – or at least, as all right-thinking religious people interpret them. An argument advanced in this thesis is that such claims to neutrality are unsustainable, and that both strategies merely displace conflict rather than meliorate it, excluding the contingent choices that these strategies rest on.

The fact that the differentiation and the common ground strategies are just as sectarian as the practice of insisting that peace and security is only possible through one particular religious tradition would be less of a problem if they were less obviously less violent. As the War on Terror has clearly shown though, drawing boundaries between those who adhere to moderate, tolerant and inclusive forms of religion and those who are exclusive and extremist has proved to be equally capable of legitimising violence. George Bush and Tony Blair appeared determined to emphasise that it should not be defined in Christian-Muslim terms.¹ The concern seemed to be that the conflict would become more intractable and more violent if it was framed as an inter-religious struggle. The revealing metaphor Kimball used was that Bush sought to keep the War on Terror from 'descending' into a Christian-Muslim conflict.² This fear was also echoed in the strongly negative response to Bush's single early reference to it as a 'crusade'. Yet framing the issue, as Blair did, as a struggle *within* traditions between moderate and extremist forms, in which as many people as possible from all faiths must be won over to the moderate cause, was considered to be an entirely reasonable and appropriate mode of representation, and one that could legitimately sanction the suppression of 'extremism' by military force. Not only is this mode of representation equally capable of justifying a conflictual 'them and us' mentality, it has proved to be just as able to provide the rationale for a sustained military campaign of violence against 'them' around the world, the reintroduction of torture and the restriction of civil liberties. There is nothing necessarily tolerant about insisting on what 'we' share in common.

A number of implications follow from these conclusions. The first is that the politics *about* religion should be recognised as an important focus of study for scholars of

¹ e.g. Blair, 'Article by the Prime Minister for the Muslim Media, 12 October 2001.'; Blair, 'Prime Minister's Statement at 10 Downing Street, 25 September 2001'; Tony Blair, 'Prime Minister's Statement on Military Action in Afghanistan, 7 October 2001.' <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page1615.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007; Blair, 'Prime Minister's Statement to Parliament on the September 11 Attacks, 4 October 2001.'; Tony Blair, 'Prime Minister's Statement to the House of Commons, 8 October 2001.' <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page1621.asp>, accessed 9 May 2007; Blair, 'Transcript of Joint Press Conference Between the Prime Minister Tony Blair, and the President of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf in Islamabad, 5 October 2001.'; George W. Bush, 'Remarks by the President at Photo Opportunity with House and Senate Leadership, 19 September, 2001', <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010919-8.html>, accessed 13 October 2008.

² Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, p. 36.

international politics. The discussion here has frequently been abstract, and has focused on what some would doubtless consider to be fairly obscure debates, but the thesis has been animated by the belief that what was at stake in these past arguments is highly relevant, given the persistence of the modern discourse of religion, combined with efforts to maintain the differentiation of politics and religion, and attempts to find a common ground among the religions of the world. The issues raised by these particular modes of conceptualising religion and the security strategies associated with them are likely to be at the heart of the fracture zones of international politics in the decades to come. Central questions here might relate to the meaning of religion, and what it means to be religious; challenges to prevailing modes of conceptualising religion, either explicitly or through the practices and activities of religious groups; the political implications of different concepts of religion; and the extent to which broader political struggles and projects shape the imagination of religion and possibilities for practicing what is denoted as religion.

A second implication is that those who study and practice international politics must be aware of the political import of even seemingly neutral statements about religion. The thesis has sought to emphasise the politics involved in all statements about religion, and that all such statements participate in broader processes of discursive negotiation through which the nature of religion and its proper social form and role is argued over and defined. Statements about religion can not stand above religious dispute, claiming to be non-sectarian and impartial, because they all involve particular modes of categorisation and classification of the world that have implications for relations of power between religious and secular subjects, and between those practicing various types of religion.

A final point concerns the modern discourse of religion that has been identified. The thesis has discussed some serious problems that attend thinking about religion in these terms. An important implication of this is that our inherited conceptual vocabulary may provide inadequate tools for understanding and responding to the challenges of a world in which religious traditions are playing an increasingly prominent part. It is bound up with the justification of a liberal order that has itself become contentious, and the strategies of security that it renders thinkable and sensible are essentially seventeenth century responses to seventeenth century problems.

Perhaps the most fundamental limitation is that these strategies are oriented to managing relations between people of different religions rather than among those who

conceive religion itself in incompatible ways. If the analysis in this thesis is correct, they may be part of the problem in the twenty-first century rather than the solution. The creative thinking that will be necessary to resolve these tensions cannot be sustained within the terms of the modern discourse of religion. It requires new modes of thought, and a greater awareness of the contingency and particularity of every ascription of meaning.

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